



# **Life Writing as Political Critique in the Spanish Habsburg Empire (1545-1557)**

by Margaret Malia Spofford Xavier

---

This thesis/dissertation document has been electronically approved by the following individuals:

Garces, Maria Antonia (Chairperson)

Cheyfitz, Eric T. (Minor Member)

Castillo, Debra Ann (Minor Member)

Cohen, Walter Isaac (Minor Member)

LIFE WRITING AS POLITICAL CRITIQUE IN THE  
SPANISH HABSBURG EMPIRE (1545-1557)

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Margaret Malia Spofford Xavier

August 2010

© 2010 Margaret Malia Spofford Xavier

LIFE WRITING AS POLITICAL CRITIQUE IN THE  
SPANISH HABSBURG EMPIRE (1545-1557)

Margaret Malia Spofford Xavier, Ph.D.

Cornell University 2010

This dissertation examines works of life writing by “outlaws” —individuals who defied the sovereign’s law while remaining engaged with it— in the Spanish Habsburg Empire under Charles V, from 1545 to 1557. Life writing, as State-sponsored, official history (*historia pro persona*), focused on the lives of illustrious men and sovereigns, and was used during the early modern period as a tool of the Spanish Crown to reinforce its sovereignty. Such lives also held a synecdochal relationship to Spain’s emerging sense of national identity. As Emperor, Charles V accorded life writing unprecedented importance. Even as he sought after *monarchia universalis*, he faced extreme challenges to his sovereignty during the period I study, including the crisis with the corsairs and the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean, the rebellion of the conquistadors in the Americas, and the schism of the Church and Empire as a result of the Reformation in Europe. Through *historia pro persona*, Charles V hoped to secure his own reputation and achieve greater unity in the Holy Roman Empire. Historians who wrote about, or were considered, outlaws, by using a legal and “official” form of writing of great value to the Emperor, were thus able to craft a daring political critique. I examine four works of life writing: Francisco López de Gómara’s *Crónica de los corsarios Barbarroja* (1545), in which he narrates the lives of the corsairs Aruj and Khair-ad-din Barbarossa, as well as his *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1552), which focuses on the life of Hernán Cortés; Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s *Comentarios* (1555), regarding his failed governorship in the Río de la Plata region; and Hans Staden’s *True History* (1557), which chronicles his captivity in Brazil in the

context of the Reformation wars. These texts spoke to the precarious status of Charles V's apparently hegemonic and homogeneous institutions and policies. In considering "unofficial" life writing alongside official *historia pro persona*, we gain a much richer understanding of the development of this historiographic subgenre, as well as its implications for political critique in Charles V's transatlantic Spanish Empire.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Malia Spofford Xavier grew up in Shoreham, New York, and began learning Spanish at a young age. She graduated from Cornell University in 1999, earning a B.A. with distinction in Spanish and English Literature. Following five years of service as an officer in the United States Navy, during which she traveled extensively and worked as a nuclear engineer on an aircraft carrier, Malia decided to return to Cornell University to work towards her Ph.D. in early modern Spanish Literature with María Antonia Garcés. She is married to Bruno Meireles Xavier, who holds his Ph.D. from Cornell in Microbiology. They have a wonderful son, Nicholas Spofford Xavier, and reside in Ouro Branco, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, where Malia will pursue a university teaching career.

*This dissertation is dedicated to my son Nicholas, that he may grow up to be curious, brave, and inquisitive, delving into the past and imagining the future with intelligence and compassion, appreciative of our world's mysteries, diverse cultures, languages, and of our painful and beautiful history.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As Graduate School is a lengthy journey, I have many people and institutions to thank. The Department of Romance Studies has been a supportive and collegial environment during these past years, which, along with the Cornell Graduate School, provided me with generous funding during my degree. The Einaudi Center for European Studies awarded me a Sicca Grant to study in Simancas and Seville, Spain during the summer of 2007, which was extremely helpful in the formulation of my thesis. In addition, the two years of Sage Fellowship I received permitted me to focus on my studies and later, on writing the dissertation. I would also like to thank the School for Criticism and Theory at Cornell for providing me with a scholarship to study during summer 2006. Cornell University Library has been extremely helpful by providing me with scanned articles and chapters while I was in absentia in Brazil.

The opportunities I had at Cornell to teach and develop courses were extremely valuable to me, and I am grateful for the training with which my department and supervisors provided me. The balance of freedom and support was optimal. I am especially indebted to Mary K. Redmond for her encouragement and enthusiasm, and to my co-worker Nidia Reyes for her cooperative spirit. My many bright students, as well, challenged me to excel as an instructor.

My advisor and committee chair, María Antonia Garcés, whose energy, generosity, and superb scholarship are an inspiration to all, has been an invaluable mentor. Her encouragement and support greatly influenced my decision to return to Graduate School to pursue my Ph.D. Professor Garcés' suggestion that I look into Gómara's writing on corsairs and conquistadors opened up a fascinating area of research for me, which I hope to pursue beyond this dissertation. I thank her for motivating me to do my best work, and for always giving me the help I needed.



The other members of my committee, Debra Castillo, Eric Cheyfitz, and Walter Cohen, have given me excellent guidance and, with their range of interests and approaches, a versatile training in scholarship across the disciplines, from feminist theory, to world literature, and Native American studies.

I would also like to thank the late Professor John Kronik, whose engaging seminars drew me into the complexities and pleasures of Spanish Literature as an undergraduate at Cornell. I will never forget his kindness and keen mind.

The friends I have made at Cornell have been wonderful and vital for “survival” and happiness. I would especially like to extend my gratitude to my “twin” Ashley and her husband Erik, and now little Julian, for always being there, through the many highs and lows, joys and sorrows, that we experienced together. Our time at Ithaca ranged over six summers of “Blu-berry” picking up at Dawson Hill and now, strangely, we are continents apart. With these friends and others, including my colleagues, I have been lucky to celebrate many milestones at Cornell. The members of Deixa Sambar and LUBRASA, my boss at the Big Red Barn, Kris Corda, as well as my co-workers there, made for both a fun and enriching life outside of the library and classroom.

Inca, our beloved St. Bernard, should be given special mention for her hours of companionship, protection, and foot warming in the frigid depths of winter.

*Especialmente gostaria de agradecer aos meus sogros e às minhas cunhadas por terem me ajudado tanto enquanto eu trabalhava nessa dissertação: cuidando do Nicholas, preparando muitos (e deliciosos) almoços, reservando um espaço amplo com muito sol para eu escrever, e aconselhando-me a “não esquentar cabeça.” Tudo isso foi de grande importância para mim. Sem eles, eu nunca teria tido o tempo, a estabilidade, e o apoio para terminar, especialmente durante nossa mudança para o Brasil.*

Most of all, though, I would like to thank my family, whose support for my education and intellectual interests has always been first. This has been an immense privilege which I was not always able to appreciate. My mother's unflagging friendship, emotional support, and concern for my happiness and success, have gotten me through some difficult times during graduate school (and at many other points), and she has always had confidence in me despite my own doubts. She instilled in me a love for reading and language since I was very young, encouraging me to enjoy and play with words. She, of course, was also the one who decided I should study Spanish. My father, among many things, taught me to "be tough" and always stay the course, no matter how difficult. His great imagination and storytelling ability brought the unseen world to life for me. He has also been my greatest model of a passionate, dynamic, dedicated, and creative teacher. I am so thankful for my family's love, and insistence that I always give my greatest possible effort, embracing challenges as they come.

Most crucially, it is the love, patience, intelligence, and strength of my amazing husband Bruno that has sustained me each and every day since we met at the beginning of grad school. He has again and again inspired me to put my heart into my dissertation, and to courageously be myself in all arenas of my life. Without his support, insight, and example, I would never have made it through this program. And last, but never least, I want to mention my deep gratitude for the blessing of our sweet and precious son Nicky, who has taught me so much about life in such a short span of time, and whose radiant love, enthusiasm, bright blue eyes and charming smile put everything in perspective.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of Figures	ix
Introduction: Biography and Subversion in Charles V's Spanish Empire	1
Chapter I: Historian as Outlaw and Sovereign: Gómara's Lives of the Corsair-Kings Barbarossa	36
Chapter II: <i>Corsario gentil y el Marqués del Valle</i> : Hernán Cortés's Parallel Lives	77
Chapter III: " <i>Por tu rey y tu ley morirás</i> ": The Economy of Autobiography in Cabeza de Vaca's <i>Comentarios</i>	127
Chapter IV: The Prophet's Passport: Writing Re-formed Lives in Hans Staden's <i>True History</i>	175
Conclusion	226
Bibliography	230

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: Frontispiece of Cabeza de Vaca's *Comentarios* (1555) p. 127
- Figure 2: "America" by Theodore de Bry after Jan van der Straet (1580) p. 167

## INTRODUCTION

### Life Writing as Political Critique in the Spanish Habsburg Empire (1545-1557)

For a “few fabulous decades” in the first half of the sixteenth century, the Spanish Habsburg Empire surged to a position of political domination in Europe and America (Elliott 2002: 13). Official historians, or *cronistas reales*, played an important role in the galvanization of Spain’s wide-flung, diverse, and often divided peoples and lands into a coherent narrative of Empire, thus serving as the “custodians of the imperial imagination” (Pagden 1995: 32). They helped to orchestrate the emergence of the largely mythical concept, “Spain,” out of the violent remainder of 1492’s landmark events: the completion of Christian *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula after eight centuries of coexistence with other faiths in Al-Andalus; the forced conversion to Christianity of the Jews, or their expulsion; and the “discovery” and possession of the New World by Christopher Columbus, in the name of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. The resulting purified narrative of possession and command—of sovereignty— was, in part, enacted through the State-sponsored lives of sovereigns, historiographic portrait galleries, and ideal genealogies of *claros varones* or *hombres ilustres* [illustrious men]. In offering an “official” conception of the ideal sovereign, such historical writings also asked who was truly “Spanish,” and what was “Spain”? These works, including Fernando del Pulgar’s *Claros varones de Castilla* [*Illustrious Men of Castile*] (1480s), overtly linked the memorialized individual to the greater identity of the kingdom or monarchy he meant to represent. The sovereign could thus “enhance his image” through official history, while taking advantage of its connection to the collective to “implement his will” (Kagan 2009: 6). As such, life writing<sup>1</sup> occupied a special position that allowed it

---

<sup>1</sup> I borrow this term from Thomas Mayer and D.R. Woolf, who state that “no society prior to the middle of the seventeenth century developed a word for ‘biography’ [...] Despite the existence of the

potentially to participate in the brokering of new forms of political authority—the creation of perceived political effects— as well as to strengthen, or control, Spain’s emerging proto-national identity.

Towards the end of his reign, King Charles I of Spain (1517-1556), best known as Holy Roman Emperor Charles V<sup>2</sup> after his election in 1519, ramped up efforts to create an “official history” of the Spanish Empire, with special emphasis on *historia pro persona*, a “personalized, king-centered history” concerned with narrating the life of the Emperor (Kagan 2009: 14).<sup>3</sup> Charles hired numerous *cronistas reales* and tasked them with writing his biography, but was rarely satisfied with the work they produced.<sup>4</sup> In the years before his abdication in 1556, Charles V was so preoccupied with how his own life would be written that he devoted hours each day to working on the unusual project of composing his memoirs with his aide-de-camp, Guillaume van Mâle, and policing the content of other histories which portrayed him unfavorably, such as the Italian Paolo Giovio’s *History of Our Times* (Kagan 2009: 86).<sup>5</sup> This signals the weight that Charles V accorded to historiography and, especially, to life writing, in the representation of the “true” character and deeds of the sovereign for posterity, going so far as to change the content of historians’ works to

---

Hellenistic term *bios* to describe life-focused historical writing, *biografia*, *biographie*, and such are later additions to the Italian and French vocabulary” (7). Life-writing also reflects some of the plasticity of the genre in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since the primary genre I analyze is called *vida* in Spanish, this term is an accurate translation. At times, for reasons of clarity, I substitute the term “biography” or “autobiography.”

<sup>2</sup> Charles V lived from 1500-1558. He died at Yuste, in Extremadura, Spain.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 2 of Richard Kagan’s *Clio and the Crown*, “*Historia pro persona*: Emperor Charles V,” discusses Charles V’s official historians and their works in great detail. Kagan also offers an excellent account of Charles’ memoirs. Another resource for learning about historiography under Charles V is Alfred Morel-Fatio’s introduction to Charles V’s *Memoires*. I am grateful to Professor Kagan for allowing me to read an advance copy of this chapter, published in Fall 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Among the various official histories written for Charles V, both *pro persona* and *pro patria* I can name: Lucio Marineo Sículo (*Opus de rebus Hispaniae memorabilibus / Obras de las cosas ilustres y excelentes de España*, 1530), Pero Mexía (*Historia imperial y cesárea*, 1545), Alonso de Santa Cruz (*Crónica del Emperador Carlos V, antes de 1551*), and Alonso Ulloa (*Vita dell’invittissimo, e sacratissimo Imperator Carlo V*, 1566).

<sup>5</sup> It is curious, as well, to consider how Charles V’s son, King Philip II, later hid these manuscripts in case his father might have revealed anything unbecoming to Empire. See Kagan 2009: 57.

make them more in his favor. As J.H. Elliott has shown, the Empire under Charles V was, to many, “a mere aggregation of territories almost fortuitously linked by a common sovereign” (2002: 167). *Historia pro persona* served to reinforce this link by elucidating the ways in which Charles stood in for the Empire and unified its communal identity.

Even though life writing is a practice which is considered to have undergone great innovation in the Renaissance, official *historia pro persona* under Charles V has been noted for its lack of originality, its outright “failure” (Kagan 2009: 91), and its “poverty” of style and substance (Alvar 219). One wonders, then, if “unofficial” life histories could better represent the development and political deployment of life writing during Charles V’s reign. My dissertation, entitled *Life Writing as Political Critique in the Spanish Habsburg Empire (1545-1557)*, explores a selection of life writing by, or about, figures I term “outlaws”: those individuals “outside the law” who threatened and troubled the official narrative of the Spanish Habsburg Empire because of their potential to blur the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of rule, as well as to complicate nascent concepts of Spanish identity.<sup>6</sup> I examine Francisco López de Gómara’s *Crónica de los corsarios Barbarroja* (1545) and his *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1552); Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s *Comentarios* (1555); and Hans Staden’s *True History* (1557).<sup>7</sup> The focus these bold works written and published during the last segment of Charles V’s rule, 1545-1557, serves to unify my study, even while it allows me to include a range of differing historiographic and legal configurations, representative of the transatlantic breadth and

---

<sup>6</sup> An outlaw may broadly be defined as a person outside-the-law, or legally abject, though not necessarily punished by the law. The relationship of sovereign to outlaw is not purely oppositional. I do not intend to use the term as a synonym to bandit. I discuss this term in detail in the next section of the introduction.

<sup>7</sup> Staden’s *True History* was published in 1557, even though it was composed during Charles V’s reign: it was given as testimony in 1555 and written in 1556. As we will see in Chapter 4, this publication date was quite significant because it followed Charles V’s abdication and held symbolic value both for Staden’s patron, Landgrave Philip of Hesse, and for the editor of the work, Dr. Johannes Dryander.

complexity of the Emperor's dream for *dominum mundi*.<sup>8</sup> The biographies and autobiographies I explore in this dissertation offered a counterpoint, often of a quite subversive nature, to Charles V's own version of his life, and thus, to the official history of Empire. Further, the lives of "outlaws" were often explicitly narrated in tension with Charles V. Historical personages who defied the sovereign, or embodied his "state of exception," such as corsair-kings and rebel conquistadors, posed a real danger to the integrity of Charles V's rule—and his *historia pro persona*—while also maintaining strong connections to the Emperor and to Spain.<sup>9</sup> These biographies dared to destabilize the carefully crafted master narratives of Spanish sovereignty and identity, through a critique of the concepts and ideals which "official" history sought to institute.

The severity of the repercussions historians faced under Charles V as a result of proposing such an unorthodox narrative cannot be overstated: per a 1502 proclamation of the Catholic Monarchs, works that went against State interests would be rounded up, burned publicly, and the historian would be banned from further authorship (Friede 1965: 298). Under Philip II, the penalties for writing or selling prohibited books included perpetual exile, the loss of all belongings, and, in some cases, death. This was especially the case for histories which showed any support of State enemies or rebellions staged against the Crown, as Juan Friede has described in detail (1965: 318). The environment of censure was serious, and great tension existed between the sovereign and historians of the Spanish Empire. Charles V was not unusual in his desire to control works of history with violence or censorship. Under his predecessors, the Catholic Monarchs, historians had been physically intimidated to

---

<sup>8</sup> In addition, this time period seems to have been the most important to Charles V himself, as we can gauge from the attention he devotes to the 1540s in his memoir (Kagan 2009: 85)

<sup>9</sup> Coined by Carl Schmitt, and subsequently developed by Giorgio Agamben and other theoreticians of biopolitics, this phrase refers to the sovereign's ability to transcend the rule of law in the name of the public good, as "he who decides on the state of exception." See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* and Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*.



alter or forge the historical record in order to invent a suitable narrative of a politically unified Spain (Kagan 2009: 49).<sup>10</sup> In 1509, King Ferdinand appointed his secretary, Lorenzo Galíndez de Carvajal, as the head of a State project to “correct and emend” existing Spanish histories into a unified work, subjecting authors, including Fernando del Pulgar, to severe censorship and rewriting (53-55). This inaugural institutional attitude towards official history greatly influenced Charles V and subsequent rulers of Spain. Many works written in the period I study later fell prey to the extreme tactics of censorship of Charles V’s heir, Philip II, who was notorious for rounding up and destroying manuscripts and books which he perceived as threatening to the narrative of Empire, including López de Gómara’s works, as we will see in Chapter One (Friede 1965: 319). Even official historical and polemical works were treated with great suspicion. Their publication was severely restricted and prohibited, given their capacity to deform or reform Spanish concepts of justice, particularly with respect to the Empire’s policies in the Americas (304). Because of the close relationship between Spanish historiography and the language of law in the early modern period, authors who chose to portray outlaws—or were outside the law themselves—had explosive capability to impinge on official histories. As Roberto González Echevarría has famously established:

In the sixteenth century writing was subservient to the law. One of the most significant changes in Spain, as the Peninsula was unified and became the center of an Empire, was the legal system, which redefined the relationship between the individual and the body politic and held a tight rein on writing [...] Legal writing was the predominant form of discourse in the Spanish Golden Age. It permeated the writing of history [and] sustained the idea of Empire (45).

Both historiography and life writing, then, were inextricably tied to the law.

---

<sup>10</sup> Kagan notes especially the work the Catholic Monarchs commissioned of Giovanni Nanni in 1498. The historian’s *Commentaries* reconstructed the list of kings of the Dark Ages based on “lost” texts, which were actually forged. This work allowed the Catholic Monarchs to claim that their monarchy predated that of their French rivals (2009:49).

Historians of outlaws, in using a traditional and official *form* of historiography such as life writing, grounded their work in legal language and often explicitly invoked Charles V himself as a means of legitimization. González Echevarría affirms that “even the most recalcitrant renegades of the sixteenth century – Lope de Aguirre<sup>11</sup>, for instance – felt that to write they had to do so according to a prescribed set of norms” (44). Yet outlaws and their historians not only sought legitimization by the Crown, but also attempted to *alter* what could be thought of *as* legitimate.

Writing lives outside the law in the sixteenth-century Spanish Empire was all the more risky for its implicit representation or critique of collective identity. As Mary M. Gaylord has shown, in Renaissance Spain, “writers lay unusual stress in their explorations of personal identity on categories of national identity,” while the reverse was also true. In fact, a kind of substitution could take place such that, “one individual can serve, synecdochically, as the part that stands in for the whole: one person or kind of person can represent an entire nation, a race, a language, a culture” (127). The idea of “a person as embodying a *life*, a story, a history” facilitated movement between “the superpersonal level and the figure of the individual.” Such tropological substitutions took place in various genres, including the chronicles of the Indies. Manuals for princes and kings demonstrated this phenomenon as well, in Gaylord’s words: “thanks to the work of metonymy, the personifications in turn tend to be composites, embodying symbolically not simply one, but a whole array of culturally endorsed virtues and capacities” (127).<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Lope de Aguirre (1510?-1561) was a Spanish conquistador who participated in the conquest of Peru, and who probably was insane. He is best known for declaring himself and his men at war against the Spanish Empire and forming a separate kingdom during his search for El Dorado down the Marañón River. Writing to Philip II in 1561, he gave himself the title of Prince of Peru and Chile. A translation of his fascinating letter is available online from the *Modern History Sourcebook*: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1561aguirre.html>

<sup>12</sup> Gaylord also asserts that sixteenth-century Spanish writers created the “(Re)conquest” model of identity, which, based on an originary transgression, required “the repeated enactment, in action and in discourse, of its rewriting (re-righting), retroping, reconquering [...] the model which makes Spaniards intelligible to themselves” (132). This model can be seen even in *El Cid* and other canonical texts tied

The lives of the outlaws I consider in this study were equally revealing of Spanish identity in the sixteenth-century, as the sovereign's 'others' who challenged the validity and force of Spanish law. The writing of history, for the political purpose of elucidating Spanish identity in the sixteenth century, was an "obsession": as Alfredo Alvar states, "it consists of narrating, telling the History of Spain, of the Spains, of the Spaniards of the Hispanic Monarchy as a weapon of self-defense to hide a gap [*laguna*]" (220). But what were historians hiding? What was this "*laguna*"? According to Alvar, the obsession stemmed from the lack of a suitable or plausible Spanish history. We can elaborate this further, however. The establishment of Spain as a State and Empire, and, gradually, a nation, generated a baffling range of categories of identity and a recombinant multiplicity of "caste" classifications, while admitting few of these as legally enfranchised or acceptable.<sup>13</sup> Despite this quest for homogeneity in the early modern Spanish Empire, a "polity in the throes of centralization and modernization," Barbara Fuchs stresses that there was still an "impossibility of drawing rigid boundaries between often indistinguishable subjects" (3). The hybrid space was the dominant, yet textually suppressed, arena of the development of the concept of the Spanish individual. The proliferation of frontier beings that resulted from this struggling dynamic of inside and outside the law made the complicated attempt toward an adequate concept of the sovereign, as well as a 'national' Spanish identity, two of the main focuses of sixteenth-century Spanish history and literature.

It becomes apparent that what was being hidden, in part, was the lack of

---

to Spanish identity, where "original sin or transgression, [is] followed by punishment, exile, testing, and finally restitution and return." Although many outlaws also sought "restitution and return" through the writing of their histories, in the works I consider, any sense of restitution is only partial, and a full return, often impossible.

<sup>13</sup> Some of these categories of classification and control included: pure blood, barbarians, cannibals, Moors, Indians, conversos, renegades, Turks, protestants, Antipodes, infidels, savages, beasts, Moriscos, heretics, mestizos, ladinos, creoles, and mamelukes.

suitable histories that accounted for Spain's "true" identity, as constituted by its perilous array of identities.<sup>14</sup> The retelling and rewriting of "Spain" to suit Charles V's imperial ambitions and vision of his own sovereignty was behind the Crown's valuation of historiography. The frenetic push to write effective and accurate histories explains the practice's consequent popularity in this period of rapid formation of the Spanish State as the center of Empire. History and life writing in the service of the Crown, because of its "political and nationalist motives," could serve to 'conquer' this unruly variety in the service of determining the character of Spain, along with traditional political divisions and competing *patrias* (Alvar 217). But histories written against the Crown, or next to it, through the life of the outlaw, unnerved this determinant "suitability."

The lives of outlaws, then, were perhaps a more compelling fulfillment of the Delphic dream of Renaissance historiography: to create *truthful* knowledge of oneself and one's country (Alvar 247). The works of unofficial life writing I analyze in this study reveal a related, but quite different, possible trajectory for the storyline of the Spanish Empire, and the characteristics of its ideal sovereign, or *hombre ilustre*. Certainly, official historical and political discourses were more interested in establishing the legitimacy of Charles V's *translatio imperii* from the Roman Empire and a lineage of "blood purity," than in representing the unprecedented diversity of the Iberian Peninsula and her "possessions," even though these were often an unmanageable reality. In the same vein, *historia pro persona* or *patria* could not be expected to lay bare the precarious underpinnings of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy's plans for increased centralization of its power and expansion of its territory, even as it faced multiple threats from within and from without, such as the

---

<sup>14</sup> See Jacques Lezra, "'La mora encantada': Covarrubias in the soul of Spain," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2000.

encroachment of the Ottoman Empire on European frontiers, the religious and political schism of the Reformation, and the rebellions of the conquistadors in the Americas. In this dissertation, finally, I trace the various ways in which an unofficial *historia pro persona*, written in tension with that of Charles V, may have destabilized the values and ideals official history sought to promote.

In many cases, it must be said, the force of the law also silenced or modified these subversive lives of outlaws, through censorship and oppression. The ambience of censure in the sixteenth-century, recorded in law in both the Iberian peninsula and in Spain's American colonies, hampered the circulation of manuscripts and books which questioned, implicitly or explicitly, the Spanish Crown's policies. This was especially true for histories about the Americas, which I consider in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, because of their potential to give away key information to Spain's enemies in Europe. In addition, the mandate of "truth" for historiography in the sixteenth century, in terms of both fidelity in representation and utility or exemplarity, imposed many hermeneutic obstacles upon writers. Some life writers, however, devised successful strategies to navigate the barriers placed by the law in their historiography. The resulting texts are illuminating for their expression of the paradox and quandaries created by the detachment of Spain's political and legal structure from the actual heterodoxy of the Spanish Empire. The perceived "danger" of history writing, which held the elucidation of truth as its explicit central purpose, and the government's vigilance over publications in this period may account for the reasons why more daring works of a similar vein, such as *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), began to be written as anonymous fiction, rather than as historiography.

Richard Kagan's recent book, *Clio and the Crown*, which examines official practices of historiography of medieval and Early Modern Spain, and the ways "different rulers put history to work" (3), including Charles V, serves as a point of

departure for my work. In turn, Kagan's *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy* offers an example of the ways in which non-official discourses, in this case dictated dreams, circulated in criticism of the current monarch, Philip II, in an attempt to change his policies. His *Inquisitorial Inquiries*, which translates several brief autobiographies of those questioned by the Spanish Inquisition, is also a valuable contribution to the study of non-official life writing within an official institution. In terms of my examination of "outlaws," González Echevarría's *Myth and Archive* offers an important foundational study in its theorization of the relationship between law, writing, and the Spanish State in the Golden Age, including the development of the genre of the picaresque and the origins of the Latin American novel. González Echevarría's discussion of the way Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, in his *Comentarios Reales*, used the language of the law to try to rewrite the history of his father, who had been branded an accomplice of the outlaw conquistador Pizarro in Peru, perhaps comes closest to this dissertation. González Echevarría's overall argument, however, is quite distinct.

Life writing is recognized as having been a prominent, if transitional, practice which underwent great innovation during the Renaissance, and that was connected to the rise of the modern State through its foregrounding of the individual (Maravall 1972: 408). Critics, such as Carmen Saén de las Casas, Sonia V. Rose, and John Slater have published various excellent articles on portrait writing and the ekphrastic nature of history in the Spanish Habsburg Empire. No studies, however, have examined transatlantic life writing under Charles V for its relationship to the modification of concept of the sovereign or *hombre ilustre*, and thus, of the emergent concept of "Spain" across its Empire. In fact, one notes a tendency to overlook Spain's contributions to life writing in many studies of this early modern "European"

subgenre, which focus instead on works produced in Italy, France, and England.<sup>15</sup> There are some notable exceptions: for example, Nicholas Spadaccini and Jenaro Taléns edited a wide-ranging group of articles on autobiographical life writing in early modern Spain.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, although there exist numerous studies of Spain's history, culture, and politics under Charles V, and a formidable body of writing on Charles V himself, none has yet examined the development of the Empire and Spanish sovereignty from the perspective of the critique of these concepts and practices, conveyed through life writing.

Because the Spanish Habsburg Empire was extremely expansive and interconnected, I will be examining life writing transatlantically. As such, my dissertation contributes to the growing field of Transatlantic Studies by making connections and showing parallels, as well as divergences, between the European, the Mediterranean, and the American theaters of expansion and conflict for sixteenth-century Spain. I find the transatlantic approach compelling for its potential to “move beyond the traditional mapping of influences, dominance, and master narratives.”<sup>17</sup> It is well suited as a method towards a greater understanding of the negotiations and circulations of life writing — a “radically mixed form” (Anderson 1)—across very distinct cultures. This approach, however, brings with it the challenges of portraying differences in cultures and languages, and the problematic translations between them, with adequate detail and sensitivity, as Eric Cheyfitz has shown in his *Poetics of*

---

<sup>15</sup> See Karl Enenkel, Betsy de Jong-Crane, and Peter Liebrechts, eds. *Modelling the Individual: Biography and Portrait in the Renaissance* (Rodopi, 1998); Thomas Mayer and Daniel Woolf, eds. *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe* (1995); Kevin Sharpe, Steven N. Zwicker, eds. *Writing Lives: Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England* (Oxford UP: 2008); and Irena Dorota Backus, *Life writing in Reformation Europe* (2008).

<sup>16</sup> Sylvia Molloy's book *At Face Value* makes a crucial contribution to the study of Spanish American autobiography from the nineteenth century forward. Doris Sommer and Angel Loureiro have also published books on testimony and autobiography in the modern period, in Latin America and Spain, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> See the Trans-Atlantic project homepage at Brown University:  
[http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Hispanic\\_Studies/people/facultypage.php?id=10291](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Hispanic_Studies/people/facultypage.php?id=10291)

*Imperialism*.<sup>18</sup> I also attempt to contribute to the work advanced in the field of Hispanic Studies, especially in the past decade, which calls attention to Eurocentrism and inadequate canons, and seeks to recuperate the diversity and complexity of early modern Spain, its colonies, and its peoples.<sup>19</sup> In general, the insightful body of work by Michel de Certeau informs my dissertation, especially his essays on sixteenth-century historiography and ethnography. While grounding my analysis in close-reading and historical context, I draw from work done in a wide range of disciplines.

### *Lives of Sovereigns and Outlaws*

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to use the word “outlaw” because it comes closest in English to conveying the literal sense of a person’s being outside the law, while still signaling his continuing relationship with it.<sup>20</sup> The outlaw is placed in a constitutive relationship with the sovereign, insofar as the sovereign creates and may suspend the law. To emphasize my special use of this term,<sup>21</sup> I limit my study to those individuals who had political connections to Charles V, as reflected in their life

---

<sup>18</sup> I discuss the problem of translation in a later section. Although I do not intend for my work to be Eurocentric, the texts I work with are European and I attempt to navigate the perils and limitations of working with these texts, as explored by José Rabasa and Eric Cheyfitz in their books. I hope to show the complexity of the term “European,” and indeed its fragility, by placing it in what I believe to be a more representative contemporary context. I also aim to place European culture in relation to other cultures, particularly the Ottomans and the Native Americans, as well as to show the importance of these cultures in their own right.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Fuchs, María Antonia Garcés, Jacques Lezra, Vincent Barletta, Lisa Voigt, and Josiah Blackmore, in addition to other scholars, have contributed greatly to this growing field within early modern Hispanic Studies. I owe a tremendous debt to their published work, lectures, conversations, and teaching. I also greatly admire and draw on the work of Anthony Pagden and Richard Kagan.

<sup>20</sup> At some level this could apply, in the case of sixteenth-century Spain, even to those who were “outsiders”: Indians, Jews, Moors/Moriscos, or Turks, among others, who were subjected to systematic repression and excision and yet remained central to Spanish identity in this period and beyond.

<sup>21</sup> In the Spanish language of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, “outlaw” would best be translated by *forajido*, *bandido*, or *fugitivo*. According to the Real Academia database CORDE, the word *fugitivo* was the more common of the three. Of these terms, *forajido* comes closest to conveying the sense of “outside,” since it is a contraction of *fuera exido*, “left outside.” See the eighteenth-century *Diccionario de Autoridades*, which defines the *forajido* as a “salteador que anda por los montes robando sin entrar en poblado” [assaulter who walks through the mountains robbing without entering the towns], thus remaining outside the place of law-making and justice (777).



histories and historical context. Sometimes these outlaws were also considered criminals, but not necessarily. Individuals could be declared outlaws for attempting to usurp the sovereign's power, like Cabeza de Vaca. There were also those who created their own laws, such as the "heretic" Martin Luther, or who violated the laws of Charles V in a direct affront to his authority, as Gonzalo Pizarro did in Peru in the 1540s. These political actors did not count crime as their "profession" or as a means to challenge State-rule, as a bandit, or "rural-insurgent" would have (Dabove 2). Rather, the outlaw's opposition to, or defiance of those in control of the law while seeking his *own* power and forging his own law, comprised his transgression and placed him outside of the sovereign's dictates of legitimacy.<sup>22</sup> Because of the outlaw's entanglement *with* the law, the potential influence of these individuals on the narrative of "Spain" remained strong. Outlaws maintained close ties to the sovereign (or may even have attempted to act *as* sovereign) while at times undermining the sovereign's power, thereby further problematizing notions of the inside and outside of official boundaries.

Yet the terms "sovereign" and "sovereignty," while now in common use, prove more problematic for the period 1545-1557. In particular, the term "sovereignty" [*souveraineté*] began to be used in French only in 1576, after Jean Bodin published his *Six livres de la République* [Six Books of the Republic]. It was defined as free, perpetual, absolute (indivisible) power in the government of human societies. In Medieval Spain, this idea of "absolute power" most closely corresponded to the religious *plenitudo potestatis*, also called *imperium*, of the Holy Roman Emperor. Anthony Pagden has shown that, especially for Charles V, the Latin term *imperium*, as

---

<sup>22</sup> As Spain had strict laws policing ethnic and religious subjectivities, being an "outlaw" could also refer to a person whose identity infringed on the control of the state over communal identity. However, here I am interested only in these subjects insofar as their life-stories were somehow directly connected to Charles V.

used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, came closest to the modern sense of “sovereignty.” Classically, *imperium* “described the sphere of executive authority possessed by the Roman magistrates” and implied a dynamic territorial and juridical dominion, “with sacral overtones,” involving the Reconquest of Christian lands and the conversion of those who belonged to other faiths (Pagden 1995:12). As the component States and monarchs of the Holy Roman Empire began consolidating and secularizing their power in the sixteenth century, however, the idea of *plentitudo potestatis* or *imperium* persisted in a different sense, instead being used to refer to the power of each king in his kingdom. The general use of the word “sovereignty” (*soberanía*) in Spanish was delayed until the seventeenth century.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the changes detailed above, the concept of empire, derived from the Latin *imperium*, also had simultaneous and shifting meanings throughout the early modern period.<sup>24</sup> For Charles V, a *monarchia universalis*, or worldwide empire, with a unifying body of law, was the defining dream—and failure—of his tenure as Holy Roman Emperor. With the motto of “plus ultra,” the Emperor, encouraged by his grand chancellor from 1518-1530, Mercurio de Gattinara, signaled his aim of achieving unprecedented power. The meanings of empire ranged from its use as a verb, meaning to exercise rule or give orders, to its use as an adjective to mean that a State was “sovereign and independent” (13). But “empire” could also refer to the “pattern of political relationships” that bound peoples together in “an extended system” (13), as well as to the “geographical extent of authority” of a given people, describing the “kind of political, and cultural, unity created out of a diversity of different states widely separated in space” (14). As such, the word delineates the

---

<sup>23</sup> Before this, the use of the word “sovereignty” was irregular. The Spanish translation of Bodin’s work by Don Gaspar de Añastro in 1590 instead used the traditional Latin concepts in place of the new word. Nonetheless, the *cronista real* Antonio de Herrera translated Botero’s *Trattato de la Ragion di Stato* (1589) using the Spanish word “soberanía,” in Bodin’s sense (Maravall 1997: 190).

<sup>24</sup> See Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 29-62 for a detailed explanation of Spain’s quest for Empire.

relationship between the individual and the collective, and the mediation of the individual with respect to the sovereign through the apparatus of the law.

“Sovereignty” emerged as a concept probably because *imperium* was unstable, insufficient, or in transition prior to the coining of the new term, which had no clear etymological precedents. For the purposes of this study, sovereignty refers not only to the power and political forms which Charles V claimed, dreamed, and imagined as his own—represented metonymically in his *historia pro persona*—but also to the traditional power and lawmaking ability of “independent” princes or kings within, and without, the Habsburg Empire.<sup>25</sup>

Charles’ dual role as King Charles I of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor reminds us that Spain was both a State in formation and the center of one of the largest Empires in European history. This “composite monarchy” was “unprecedented in its territorial extent [and] remarkable in its institutional heterogeneity” (Gil Pujol 417).

Consider how correspondence was addressed to this sovereign:

Carlos, emperador siempre Augusto, rey de Alemania, de Castilla, de Aragón, de las dos Sicilias, de Jerusalén, de Hungría, de Dalmacia, de Navarra, de Granada, de Toledo, de Valencia, de Galicia, de Sevilla, de Mallorca, de Cerdeña, de Córdoba, de Córcega, de Mucia, de Jaén, de los Algarbes, de Algeciras, de Gibraltar, de las islas Canarias, de las Indias, islas y tierra firme del mar Oceano; archiduque de Austria, duque de Borgoña, de Brabante, Lotaringia, Carintia y Carniola, de Luxemburgo, de Limburgo, de Güeldres, de Atenas y Neopatria; conde de Brisna, de Flandes, de Tirol, de Jabsburgo, de Artois y Borgoña; conde palatino de Hainaut, de Holanda, de Zelanda, de Ferut, de Fribuque, de Amuque, de Rosellón y Cerdaña; landgrave de Alsacia; marqueses de Borgoña y del Sacro Romano Imperio, de Oristan y Gociano; príncipe de Cataluña y Suabia; señor de Frisia, de las Marcas, de Labono, de Puerta, de Vizcaya, de Molina, de Salinas y de Trípoli

For Charles V, ruling over his seemingly endless list of territories meant navigating the challenges of the local and foreign, peninsular and global, national and imperial, the particular and the universal—tensions which in many senses gave form to this

---

<sup>25</sup> “Sovereignty” is a term which does not translate into most Native American societies, and, in fact, has been an extremely damaging concept within the context of European Imperialism. I address this problem of translation below in my Introduction.

period of rapid and unprecedented changes. As “one of the most complex polities in the early modern period,” the Habsburg monarchy, and consequently Spain, revealed a constant ‘jostling’ for supremacy between those with claims to power that “contributed to defining the boundaries of sovereignty”; the centralized state “was only one—and often not the strongest—of a number of institutions and individuals each seeking to establish its preeminence” (Gibbs, 6, 8). One such regional force in Spain which served as a check on Charles V’s imperial aspirations was known as *patria*, that political unit to which one feels affectively linked—at that time, it usually was a city, such as Seville, or a kingdom, such as Castile. Even during the 1540s to the 1550s, when the concept of Spain displaced the vocabulary of kingdom, the role Spain should play within Empire was still greatly contested through a range of discourses. Challenges to the sovereignty of Charles V by individuals (such as outlaws), issued through history and life writing, were an important factor in the political modernization of Spain and Spanish identity.

*“The Historian’s Task”: Life Writing and Humanist Historiography*

Basic to the understanding of how works of history, including life writing, could function as political critique of the sovereign, is an elucidation of some fundamental objectives and concerns of Renaissance Humanist historiography. I wish to underscore that, in the 1540s and 1550s, despite history and life writing’s increasing popularity, there was still no fixed notion of what History was meant to do, or how it should best do it: these were disputed topics that had multiple answers. Spanish and Italian Renaissance Humanists cultivated and innovated a variety of types of History through a recovery of primarily Greek and Roman historians, orators, and

philosophers.<sup>26</sup> In Spain, these productions ranged from general histories of humanity, to treatises on how to write History, specific histories with political ends, and chronicles of the Indies (Alvar 219). Although adherence to classical models demonstrated erudition and garnered authority, Humanists were not interested in a mere replication of ancient practices. Rather, they sought to further define these models for their own, present purposes. As a result, many metahistorical treatises, or *artes historicae*, appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain, including those by the *cronistas reales* Luis Cabrera de Córdoba (1559-1623) and Juan Páez de Castro (1512-1570), as well as Gómara's preface to the *Crónica*, which I study in Chapter 1.

Perhaps the most firm unifying principle of Humanistic historiography was its ideal of serving as a lamp of truth, "*lux veritatis*." Truth, in the sixteenth century, was understood as the focus of the historian, who should seek to faithfully represent events and personages without embellishment or distortion. He should use reliable sources, or be an eyewitness, thoroughly investigate his facts and treat a useful theme, employing a style that did not obscure or invent evidence. Historians further drew a distinction between *veritas*, as the wholly truthful, and verisimilitude, as the appearance or possibility of truth (Kagan 2009: 6). This differentiation often played into the debate over the use of rhetoric and figurative language in historical works, a practice regarded with suspicion for its ability to create a separate, poetic reality that did not necessarily refer to objective facts or events. The troubled relationship between "truth" and rhetoric was vital in Humanist debates, from Luis Vives, to Sebastián Fox Morcillo and Antonio Lull (Kohut 2009: 159). Cabrera de Córdoba

---

<sup>26</sup> Greek biography, including the works of Xenophon, Herodotus, and Thucydides, was more provisional in nature than Roman biography, which had more influence on the Renaissance Humanists. Suetonius, Plutarch, Cicero, among others, were dominant models for the fourteenth-century Italians and their intellectual descendents throughout Europe and the Americas (Mayer and Woolf 10).

also noted this slippery territory occupied by the historian, located between the “naked truth” of the philosopher and the rhetorical manipulation of the orator (Adorno 1986: 38). Historians’ heavy reliance on rhetoric, structures of narrative, and the “four master tropes” (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) made much historical writing, and especially life writing, uncomfortably close to either poetry or fiction (Mayer and Woolf 4).

The Renaissance historians’ preoccupation with truth led to multiple theories on the proper function of history and the role of the historian. In Spain, there was a dominant current of thought which defined historical “truth” in relation to its utility to society and the sovereign, thereby suggesting history’s political role. The Spanish humanist Luis Vives and Charles V’s royal historian Páez de Castro located the truth of history in civil affairs (Adorno 1986: 37). Their assertions followed the tradition of Cicero, in which history was conceived of as *magistra vitae*, literally a teacher of life, but also “a teacher of individuals and nations” (37), written by a wise man.<sup>27</sup> Such didactic history was central to preserving genealogy, the rights of possession, the origins of peoples and kingdoms, and the foundation of the law, thus serving “the public good” (Adorno 1986: 38) and furthering the glory of the State and Empire. Aristotle’s assertion in Book I of the *Rhetoric* that history was useful for politicians, then, was considered indisputable, and this gave great practical value to Spanish works of history. As Charles V’s official historian, Pedro Mexía, argued, “Historia son las letras y lección que más útiles son y más convenientes a los Príncipes y Reyes” [History consists of those stories and lessons that are most useful and helpful to Princes and Kings].<sup>28</sup> Cabrera de Córdoba, in turn, asserted that the historian’s task

---

<sup>27</sup> History, as a teacher of past errors, could help a society mature, and according to Mexía, “dar los moços prudencia de ancianos” [give young men the wisdom of the old] (cited in Alvar 240). For Juan Costa, an Aragonese humanist, history was not only exemplary in nature, but also contained a “moral essence,” demonstrating virtues and vices (38). For Costa and many others, history should demonstrate truth and appeal to logic, but shouldn’t seek to persuade.

<sup>28</sup> Mexía also featured a series of portraits of emperors in his *Historia imperial y cesárea* (1545).

was related to the sovereign's exercise of rule, as he created "the prince's reputation and that of his nation" (Adorno 1986: 38).

Yet it remained questionable if the public good was best benefited through official history, the truth of which was necessarily subservient to the interests of the sovereign, or through a critique, implicit or explicit, of the sovereign's ineffective policies and practices. Historians who chose "outlaws" as their subject opted for the latter, more risky path towards truth and utility. One danger of political critique, however, was the appearance of the historian's desire to supplant the sovereign. Michel de Certeau discusses the limits for the sixteenth-century historian's political role in *The Writing of History*:

[Historians] do not make history, they can only engage in the making of histories [...] They are solely "around" power [...] Thus located in the vicinity of political problems—but not in the place where political power is exercised—historiography is given an ambivalent status [...] It is in a strange situation, at once critical and fictive [...] When the historian seeks to establish, for the place of power, the rules of political conduct and the best political institutions, he plays the role of the prince that he is not; he analyzes what the prince ought to do [...] The historian depends on the prince "in fact" and he produces "the virtual prince" (1988: 8).

In his comment that history is "at once critical and fictive," De Certeau underscores the difficulty political writing posed for history's aim of *lux veritatis*. This was perhaps most pronounced for official historians, whose livelihood depended on producing a narrative pleasing to the sovereign. Historians of "outlaws," writing from a place *outside* of power, and about a subject outside of the law, had a greater capacity for political critique, while satisfying the criteria for both truth and utility.

Nonetheless, historians did not make the law, but rather made sense of it, and sometimes imbued it with new meanings. This process was considered crucial for the continuation and glory of the body politic, as the work of Francisco López de Gómara, which I consider in Chapters 1 and 2, demonstrates. Throughout the sixteenth century, then, both official and unofficial historiography, in its pursuit of truth and utility,

struggled towards greater self-definition and political efficacy.

### *Life Writing in Sixteenth-Century Spain*

Life writing was powerful means of achieving political critique in Charles V's Spanish Empire. A clarification of life writing's relationship to history illuminates its particular role within the broader context of social utility and exemplarity. Because of the heightened rhetorical and subjective nature of life writing, which included autobiography, the classification of life writing with respect to history was far from decided in the sixteenth century. Usually, Renaissance Humanists considered life writing, in its various forms, as only one mode of writing history.<sup>29</sup> In some important instances, however, life writing was placed in direct contrast with "history," because of its greater reliance on figurative language and the subservience of historical facts to the depiction of a person's character, particular deeds, and physical appearance (Adorno 1986: 40-41). Even as life writing seemed an unreliable option for historical concerns, exemplarity fell short of a "true" representation of the individual's character and life (Mayer and Woolf 2-3). The counter-exemplar lives of outlaws, set against the stagnant productions of official history, still aimed to serve society and even counsel the sovereign. Yet the appeal of these works of life writing was in part attributable to their exposure of human complexity, and their valuation of a multiplicity of identities and alternative political practices. The unusual nature of imperial expansion and conflict in sixteenth-century Spain—even as it saw itself another Rome—inspired subversions of the normally ideologically bound genre of life writing. The authors I study dared to contest concepts of justice, law, authority

---

<sup>29</sup> Italian historian Paolo Giovio (1483-1552) played an important role in the revival of the *vita* in the sixteenth century. This form portrayed the life of a celebrated individual, over and against classical models.



underlying the State and Empire, as imagined through biography of its agents and enemies. Rooted in traditional forms and practices, these works created dangerous tension with the sovereign and State, and effectively expressed writers' dissidence.

Even though many models existed for life writers in the Renaissance, the forms of life writing in circulation were somewhat unstable. While this meant that there were no standardized criteria for the representation of lives, it also allowed for innovation on the part of authors: the sixteenth century was a "wide-open climate of experimentation" for life writers (Mayer and Woolf 7). In addition to "vidas" (*vita*), there were the portrait, the chronicle, the memoir, letters, commentaries, *miroir du prince*, and annals, among other forms in which life writing played a role. When paired with first-person and third-person narrative voices, these divisions and refinement of discursive types and structures were seemingly endless.<sup>30</sup>

The main concerns of early modern life writers, whether official or unofficial, included how to balance deeds and character, and yet create a recognizable "life"; how this life would serve as an example, either on a personal or a national level; whether or not to narrate the person's life wholly diachronically; how much to tell about a person's virtues and vices, including his physical appearance and lineage, and whether or not this required his being dead. Increasingly, historians aimed not just to write deeds or features of a person, but to give a complete and accurate account of at least a segment in a life. The differences between portrait-style life writing and an extended narrative of a life, two main types of life writing in the sixteenth-century, revolved around the questions listed above.

---

<sup>30</sup> Life writing's instability in the early modern period is further suggested by the lack of specialized terminology referring to the practice of life writing until the seventeenth century in Romance languages (1615 in Spanish, according to the Real Academia) and in English (1683, *OED*). Walter Mignolo stresses that the distinct categories of historiographical writing were still being worked out and experimented with in the sixteenth and even into the seventeenth-century, and were often unclear and sometimes accepted as synonyms (380). Autobiography is another, important facet of life writing which I treat primarily in Chapters 3 and 4.

The many models, “constrictions of form,” and general traditions of life writing in circulation answered these concerns in a variety of ways (Mayer and Woolf 7).<sup>31</sup> The exemplary life according to Plutarch, one of Shakespeare’s most important classical sources, placed emphasis on character over the deeds of an individual, and was considered the least “historical” of the types of life writing. The courtly tradition, in accordance with Suetonius, critical of its subject and privileging the narration of deeds as a means of revealing character, was a more risky option for Renaissance writers. Yet some historians, especially those who wrote to critique Charles V, like Gómara, did push the limit of acceptable discourse. Perhaps the most prevalent type of life writing in sixteenth century Spain was the portrait. In fourteenth-century Italy, Petrarch and Boccaccio had popularized portrait writing, which was highly didactic in nature, although not always cautionary, and sometimes included the lives of criminals (13). Over time, portrait writing became an important practice throughout Renaissance Europe.

There was a distinctly Spanish tradition of portrait writing, which collected the lives of sovereigns and nobility and asserted them as “collective biographies” of “Spain” (Rose 117). These collections appeared quite early, with Juan Gil de Zamora’s *Liber illustrium personarum* in the thirteenth-century, and, more famously, continued in the fifteenth century with Fernán Pérez de Guzmán’s widely-read *Generaciones y semblanzas* [*Pen-Portraits of Illustrious Castilians*] (c.1450) and Fernando del Pulgar’s popular *Claros varones de Castilla* [*Illustrious Men of Castile*] (1480s).<sup>32</sup> These pen-portrait collections displayed clear connections to politics and ideology of the nation. Both texts were concerned with the emergence and triumph of

---

<sup>31</sup> The early chronicles of the Indies did not have adequate models and should, to some degree, be considered an exception (Kohut 2009; Myers 2007), which I discuss below in this Introduction.

<sup>32</sup> Pérez de Guzmán’s work was printed three times in Spain during the first half of the sixteenth century, while Pulgar’s work saw eight printings by the middle of the sixteenth century (Carman 88).

the Trastámara lineage, to which Queen Isabella belonged, in a time of political schism and crisis. Maravall notes the “individual energies” of these works as hallmarks of Spain’s Renaissance (1999: 18).<sup>33</sup> Pulgar and Pérez de Guzmán, in writing portraits, sought to restore a previous “order”—one that was mythical and imaginary, and which emphasized the importance of the individual’s life history to the creation of national identity. Furthermore, on a more practical level, these collections served as historiographical models, establishing “the rhetorical pattern for the portrait’s internal organization” followed by most sixteenth century historians, such as Gómara: “The portrait—whose origins are inextricably linked to the royal chronicle—continued to develop in sixteenth-century historiography, in which it became a *conditio sine qua non*” (Rose 118).<sup>34</sup> As such, both Gómara’s elaboration of the concept of *hombre ilustre* in his *Conquest of Mexico* and, as I explore in Chapter 3, Cabeza de Vaca’s preface to his *Comentarios* (1555), fashioned as a *miroir du prince*, must be situated in relation to this distinctly Spanish tradition of “pen-portraits” of the lives of sovereigns and illustrious men.

The *miroir du prince*, or mirror for princes, goes beyond the portrait, however, and sheds light on the connections between life writing and sovereignty. Written in a prescriptive mode—*how* to live one’s life—the *miroir* offered a model for the prince’s behavior and the virtuous practice of good government. In Spain, manuals of princely advice were widely written, and even the *Siete Partidas* of King Alphonse X, the Wise, included the traits of a Christian Prince and Spanish monarch (Rose 127). In addition, the *Siete Partidas* offers “vivid definitions of such concepts as ‘fame, ‘treason’, and ‘tyranny,’” and provides a “coherent framework of ideas” for the

---

<sup>33</sup> Portrait writing continued with sixteenth-century historians, who played an important role in the creation of “Spain” and then, the Spanish Empire. Some important official historians whose works we find in the field of sixteenth-century Spanish life writing include Fray Antonio de Guevara’s *Década de césares* (1539) and Pedro Mexía’s *Historia imperial y cesárea* (1545).

<sup>34</sup> Sonia V. Rose explains this pattern as follows: 1. Lineage 2. Physical description; 3. Character traits; 4. Position occupied; 5. Vices; 6. Virtues; 7. Date and place of death (118, n. 30).

Castilian hidalgo (Rose 116). Famous examples of the *miroir du prince* in sixteenth-century Spain include Erasmus' *Education of a Christian Prince*, written for Charles V in 1516; Fray Antonio de Guevara's *Libro llamado Relox de Príncipes* (1529), as well as Baldassar Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano* (1528).<sup>35</sup> Even a type such as the *miroir du prince*, however, could combine a variety of approaches to life writing, or could serve as one facet of "biography," more broadly considered.<sup>36</sup>

For Charles V, perhaps the most important type of life writing was the *Res Gestae* or "life and times of a great person," usually a military or political leader.<sup>37</sup> Also called "commentaries" and often classified as a "history," rather than a *vida*, the *Res Gestae* could be written while the subject was still alive, making it a popular choice for sovereigns, even though it was seen as an act of vanity. In the Renaissance, the most famous classical example of this type of life writing was Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic and Civil Wars* (58-47 BCE). In fact, Caesar's autobiography in third-person was an important model for Charles V's own memoirs; he kept it at his library at Yuste, where he retired after his abdication in 1556. It would also be a very important model for the disgraced conquistador, Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, when he attempted to restore his reputation for posterity. By using this type of model, the historian indicated a tacit connection between the subject of the commentaries and his significance to the State or Empire. Cabeza de Vaca used the

---

<sup>35</sup> See also Ana Isabel Buescu, "The Utopia of a Perfect Prince: Recurrences in Modern Europe's 'Mirrors for the Prince'" (1993) and "Corte, poder e utopia: O *Relox de Príncipes* (1529) de Fr. Antonio de Guevara e a sua fortuna na Europa do século XVI" (2009).

<sup>36</sup> In reference to the vernacular biographies of kings in late Medieval France, Daisy Delogu discusses the fluidity and "recombinant" nature of this genre: "kings' lives were shaped by a range of literary discourses, notably hagiographies, *chansons de geste*, and Arthurian romances. They thus provide an opportunity to consider the ways in which the canonical genres of the high Middle Ages evolved and recombined in subsequent centuries, and how they interacted with chronicles, *vitae*, and *miroirs du prince*" (5).

<sup>37</sup> Other types of life writing, beyond the scope of this dissertation included Italian and Spanish hagiographies and sacred biographies, often found in Protestant countries. It is also crucial to reiterate that much life writing could be found outside of these more established forms-- in letters, journals, political treatises, and dedications (Mayer and Woolf, 15-16). Much life writing maintained a close relationship with visual forms, such as engravings, paintings, and emblem books (17).

title *Comentarios* quite strategically in his own portrayal of his life, which, like Caesar's, was written in the third-person. Commentaries featuring "outlaws" were implicitly in parallel with the classical "great" leader by virtue of the form, and thus could offer an effective counterpoint to official history.

*History as Event: Writing Lives in the "New World"*

Whereas much of European life writing depended on classical models, the lack of textual precedents for histories about the "New World" meant that historians were, to some degree, set adrift. Cabeza de Vaca's *Comentarios*, Gómara's *Conquest of Mexico*, and Hans Staden's *True History* (1557), which I address in Chapter 4, foreground some of the challenges associated with writing about the European encounters with, and their understanding of, the Americas. As Walter Mignolo has shown, the first histories of the Indies were based on the content of questionnaires furnished to conquistadors by the Catholic Monarchs (1992: 74). Through these questionnaires, the sovereigns sought to obtain information about the geography and peoples of the Americas and thereby expand their understanding, without direct experience, of their new transatlantic "possessions." By blending such specific modes of inquiry with letters and diaries, authors, as respondents to the sovereign, developed new historiographical forms and techniques, or found their classical approach transformed by the profoundly different subject material they confronted. As Michael Brennan describes, the first accounts of the "Indies" seem to be a pastiche of various types of historical writing: "a strangely eclectic blend of chronological narrative, descriptions of landscapes, justifications of military actions, political interpretations, and anthropological curiosity over the customs, beliefs, and social practices of the native population" (228). As the sixteenth-century progressed, however, and the New

World was no longer quite so new, historians such as Gómara attempted to use a Humanist approach to the history of the Americas, as is evident in his *Conquest of Mexico* (Kohut 2009: 32).

Early American history, including life writing, was thus rooted in the Spanish sovereign's organized inquiry of distant lands. What historians claimed to "know" as truth about America and its natives, however, needs further consideration. Whether historians responded to, or against, the sovereign, their descriptions of the American continent were constructed and highly ideological in nature. In particular, life writing about outlaws in America, insofar as it served as political critique, challenged and sought to refashion Spanish concepts of justice, and played directly into the mid-sixteenth century Spanish debates on just war. The ethical doctrine of just war, or *bellum iustum*, in the military, philosophical, and political sense, was at the very center of this controversy of Spanish actions in the Americas. The proposed criteria and conditions necessary to justify going to war against the Native Americans (*jus ad bellum*) as well as the nature of waging that war (*jus in bello*) were deeply divisive. Did Spaniards have the right, through divine or natural law, to use violence to bring the Amerindians under the yoke of their sovereign power? Where did such a right derive from, and under which conditions was it applicable? And what means were permissible or acceptable to achieve the Amerindians' submission? The Spanish Habsburg Empire was the first major European colonial presence in the Americas, and Charles V's government was paralyzed with arguments about Spanish rights to violently possess, occupy, and extract wealth from these lands and people. As Cristián Roa-de-la-Carrera states, "the agitation concerning the well-being of the indigenous population reached its peak when Charles V returned to Spain in 1541 and did not culminate until 1550 in the long debate in Valladolid between Las Casas and Sepúlveda" (40). Most notably, the attempted enforcement of the New Laws of 1542,

which restricted the rights of conquistadors and sought for the improved treatment of Native Americans, sparked civil wars in the colonies, and there was widespread opposition to Charles V.

No matter which side of the debate historians of outlaws fell on, by virtue of their featured subject, their works to a great degree touched on these concerns of justice, the law, and the rights of the Spanish sovereign. Because of the controversial and cruel nature of Spanish domination of the Native American peoples and occupation of their ancestral lands, histories about these subjects tended to be highly “polemical” in nature, as Rolena Adorno has shown. These “polemics of possession,” as she points out in her book of the same name,

were ‘not merely reflective of social and political practices but were in fact constitutive of them.’ These works do not describe events; they *are* events, and they transcend self-reference to refer to the world outside themselves. This referentiality, however, is not historical, as in the historical truth whose referent is a past event. It is instead rhetorical and polemical, with the objective of influencing readers’ perceptions, royal policies, and social practices (4).

As such, the representation of lives, including Native American lives, in the context of New World historiography, had a heightened political effectiveness: beyond a mere retelling, these histories could revise the future course of the Spanish Empire.

Precisely because of their capacity to effect changes in society, such histories of the New World are problematic from an epistemological perspective. Whether historians had been to America or not, they asserted their authority to impose an ‘intelligible’ order, a kind of law and sovereign grid, on American subject matter. Especially clergy, like Gómara, considered themselves qualified to order space, time, and event as “history,” even without going to these new lands or conversing with their inhabitants (Mignolo 1992: 78). Indeed, in depicting indigenous societies, Gómara and other writers of the Americas would have felt “justified” in their written construction of American identity and lives, as we will see in the case of the Aztec

ruler Moctezuma in Chapter Two, probably because of the pervasive ideology of Spanish superiority, linked to the practice of writing itself, that made up part of the argument of just war. As Sepúlveda insisted in his *Democrates Alter*, war could be justified to restore the proper order of civilizations, whereby the most powerful and most perfect rule over the weakest and most imperfect. The absence of writing, understood as alphabetic writing, among Amerindians was a key criteria in establishing European superiority. On a more concrete level, historians also held a great power to brand foreign rulers, such as Moctezuma or Atahualpa, as “tyrannical,” thus justifying Spanish conquest. Yet the power to construct an American reality per ideological motives was not without limits. As the sixteenth century progressed, and dangerous or “mendacious” unofficial histories multiplied, documentary and eyewitness evidence, rather than ideological conjecture, was of the utmost importance in establishing truth as the primary criteria of historical value. Historians were subject to the pressure to report first-hand knowledge, obtained through experience or interview, in keeping with the word’s Greek etymology (Mignolo 1992: 75). Authority to “know” and represent America increasingly was linked to first-hand experience. On the one hand, Gómara was severely critiqued for never having been to the New World, and his rivals branded his works inaccurate. On the other hand, Cabeza de Vaca’s extensive (and probably transgressive) experiences in the Americas while acting in an official capacity had to be suppressed and somehow woven back into normative imperial narratives of discovery and conquest.

The novelty that gave histories of the New World their potency, however, was often a premise of imperialism in its violent, even genocidal, encounter with the peoples and cultures of this same “New World.” Translation, as well as eloquence, principles fundamental to historiography, were also both “central acts” of imperialism that formed part of the “machinery of terror” of colonial rule in the Americas



(Cheyfitz 104; Rabasa 2000: 10). European concepts such as “sovereignty,” “king,” “possession,” and “law” did not translate into kin-ordered Native American societies.<sup>38</sup> Instead, these terms were used to dominate these populations for the profit and expansion of European empires. If we accept the hypothesis that “the Spaniard searched for his identity in the mirror of the American other” (Gaylord 135), the representation of the lives of the indigenous, including Native American chiefs, “kings,” and “emperors,” in the works I study is extremely problematic. In the three transatlantic works I include in this dissertation, Native American societies play a definitive role in the narrative: among the Nahuas and Aztecs in the *Conquest of Mexico*, the Guaraní of the Río de la Plata Region in the *Comentarios*, and the Tupinambá of Brazil in the *True History*. For the most part, the lives of Native Americans appear in the texts to justify or enhance the lives of protagonists. Moctezuma’s grandeur serves to elevate Cortés as an illustrious man, and Cabeza de Vaca’s loyal Guaraní servants prove his clemency as an ideal governor. Many times these lives are also portrayed in an elegiac mode, in part because, as untranslatable, they could *not* be “truthfully” portrayed within European historical forms. In some works of life writing, however, such as in Hans Staden’s *True History*, the protagonist undergoes a cross-cultural transformation, and translation seems to have had a reverse effect: it served to destabilize European frameworks of knowledge and control. The American context, then, was extremely important for exploring a range of subjectivities outside-the-law, but while these histories were politically effective in Spain, it was often at the expense of Native American societies.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

<sup>38</sup> See Taiaiake Alfred’s essay “Sovereignty” in Joanne Barker, ed. *Sovereignty Matters* (2005). He explains how native peoples got “entangled” in discourses of sovereignty, and that “sovereignty itself implies a set of values and objects that put it in direct opposition to the values and objectives found in most traditional indigenous philosophies” (43).

I begin my exploration of “unofficial” life histories in the Mediterranean, one of the arenas in which Charles V set out to establish himself as an ideal Christian Prince, fending off the advances of the Ottoman Empire and continuing the *Reconquista*, started by his grandfather Ferdinand, in North Africa. Yet the increase of corsair warfare in the sixteenth century created a crisis for Charles V’s military and political strategies, and his reputation, along with Spain’s territorial integrity and potential for imperial expansion, were in grave danger. Chapter 1 of my dissertation, “Historian as Outlaw and Sovereign: Gómara’s Lives of the Corsair-Kings Barbarossa,” discusses Francisco López de Gómara’s *Crónica de los corsarios Barbarroja* (1545). This work theorizes historiography and life writing as it details the ‘admirable’ lives of ‘Arūdj and Khayr Dīn Barbarossa, two originally Greek corsairs and founders of the modern State of Algiers (now Algeria), who worked in the service of the Ottoman Empire, gravely threatening Spanish prosperity. In the *Crónica*, Gómara uses Plutarch as his model by placing these corsairs in opposition to Charles V and signaling them as “parallel lives” to that of the conquistador of Mexico, Hernán Cortés. Such unexpected “parallel lives” indicate the range of political forms in practice in sixteenth-century Spain and exemplify the entangled relationship of outlaw and sovereign. Filled with acerbic critiques of Charles V’s policies and character, Gómara’s *Crónica* proposes history and the historian as a supplement to the ineffectual actions of the sovereign. Through the use of Renaissance Humanist techniques, such as illusionism, Gómara attempts to textually solve the crisis represented by the actions of the corsairs in the Mediterranean and on the coasts of Spain and Italy. As a Humanist, Gómara was keenly aware of the tradition of history and life writing of which he was part, and the *Crónica* features a rich meta-historical treatise in its preface. In his reflections on the nature of historiography and life writing, as well as on the risks of writing about the infidel, Gómara alerts the reader to

the nascent, debated character of both historiography and the relationship of the historian to his society and to his Prince.

As I suggest in my earlier discussion, Gómara conceived of his lives of the Barbarossa brothers as the “companion” work to his projected life of Cortés. Such a jolting parallel between Cortés and some of Spain’s greatest enemies had serious implications for “national” identity, since Cortés, while controversial, was nonetheless considered a Spanish hero. In Chapter 2, entitled “*El corsario gentil y el Marqués del Valle*: Hernán Cortés’s Parallel Lives,” I focus on Gómara’s famous *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1552), which showcases the historian’s more developed approach to life writing. The *Conquest of Mexico* is remarkable for its conflation of history and biography, such that Cortés’s life *is* the history of the conquest of Mexico. Gómara proposes the conquistador as an example of the new *hombre ilustre*, whose example Spain would have to follow, too, if it wished to increase in glory. This was an especially difficult proposition for the historian to make, because of Cortés’s problematic, if creative, relationship with Spanish law and with Charles V. Despite being appointed as *adelantado* of New Spain in 1522, Cortés was always considered a threat to the Crown, and he spent the last decades of his life prosecuted as a criminal by both the Council of the Indies and Charles V. In order to match the challenges posed by his subject, Gómara modified the forms of life writing then in circulation. His politically engaged work of admiration for the controversial conquistador, however, was itself prohibited and officially removed from circulation in Spain by Prince Philip, the future Philip II, within a year of its first publication in 1552.

Many conquistadors, seeking wealth and power far from Charles V’s seat of power, were accused of violating the law and threatening the authority of the Spanish Crown. Not all of these “criminals,” however, wrote histories in their defense—but Cabeza de Vaca did. In Chapter 3, entitled ““*Por tu rey y tu ley morirás*”: The

Economy of Autobiography in Cabeza de Vaca's *Comentarios*," I study the challenges imposed by the law for the writing of Álgvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Comentarios* (1555). A variety of *Res Gestae*, these autobiographical memoirs (ghostwritten by his secretary, Pero Hernández) pose as "history" and chronicle Cabeza de Vaca's quasi-seditious, failed governorship of Río de la Plata. His text was written in Spain, following a near decade of legal proceedings and his conviction in violation of Charles V's New Laws of 1542, which sought to limit the power of the conquistadors, increase the central authority of the Crown, and protect the Native American population by the gradual abolition of the labor system known as the *encomienda*. Through his preface, Cabeza de Vaca theorizes the ideal sovereign, and attempts to portray his governorship as a practice of the model principles he sets forth. Even though Cabeza de Vaca legally lost his title as *adelantado* as part of his criminal sentencing, he continued to use it on the frontispiece of his *Comentarios*. The text does not explicitly account for this restitution of identity. I show how Cabeza de Vaca devises a clever strategy to pay homage to the legal demands of historiography, but evade legal argument (which had failed him in court). Since documents were, by and large, the medium through which his innocence or guilt was determined, he includes numerous "silenced" documents in the *Comentarios*, such as letters and memoranda, the unrevealed content of which the author implies would have vindicated him and restored his title as *adelantado* of Río de la Plata. Since for Cabeza de Vaca, the language of the law, on which historiography was based in Spain, was insufficient to convey the problems of sovereignty produced by the conquest of America (which resulted in his "crimes"), these documents, outside of refutable legal argument, allow Cabeza de Vaca to achieve a textual restoration of his "ideal" self, set against Charles V.

In Chapter 4, entitled "The Prophet's Passport: Writing Re-formed Lives in Hans Staden's *True History*," I offer an analysis of Hans Staden's autobiographical

travel narrative, the *True History* (1557), where I explore the limits of the use of an individual's life history for the objectives of European political discourse. Although this is a German, rather than a Spanish work, it was circulated within the context of the political conflicts of the Reformation in the Holy Roman Empire as a result of Charles V's violent push for imperial unity. In a last-ditch effort to promote himself as an effective sovereign for posterity, Charles V commissioned several accounts of his victory over the "heretic" rebellion in Germany in the War of the Schmalkaldic League (1546-7). Staden, a mercenary soldier from Reformation Hesse, fled his homeland after the War, and sailed to South America in search of wealth. Captured by the Tupinambá Amerindians in Brazil in 1554, he managed to escape sacrifice in anthropophagic ritual through becoming a "prophet," and returned to Hesse in 1555. His patron and Prince, Landgrave Philip of Hesse, had been Charles V's main rival in the Schmalkaldic War, and was imprisoned for several years afterwards. The Landgrave probably sought to publish Staden's autobiography as a political narrative of Protestant triumph following the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 and the Emperor's abdication. The problems of the construction and institutional control of Staden's subjectivity through activities of translation and "fictionalization" are prominent in this text, reflected in Staden's shifting "identities" throughout his journey. Life writing about Protestants in the Reformation tended to fall into two categories: the "lives of the reformers as restorers of the true faith, and the lives of them as heretics" (Backus vii). In order for Staden's life to function as part of the Protestant triumph over the oppression of imperial rule, and as a critique of Charles V, his Prince and patron Landgrave Philip of Hesse needed to assure the traveler's ambiguous life history would fall into the former, and not the latter, category. However, Staden's untranslatable transformation, along with the displacement and distortion inherent to both transatlantic travel narrative and autobiographical writing, make a "unitary,"

political identity impossible to achieve. While an outlaw's life history, like Staden's, could serve to *directly* critique a sovereign, it could *not* be co-opted by an intermediary Prince with legal power over his subjects, such as Landgrave Hesse, in order to deploy the history as political critique, in this case, of Charles V.

In sum, this dissertation traces the transatlantic negotiations of life writing, between the outlaw and the sovereign Charles V in his Spanish Habsburg Empire from 1545 to 1557. It seeks to elucidate the ways in which life histories of "outlaws" served to counter and challenge the Emperor's official version (*historia pro persona*) of his character and deeds, and the nature of his sovereignty, as he aspired to *monarchia universalis*. Because of the traditional connection between the lives of the sovereign or nobility, and the greater sense of Spanish national identity, the lives of outlaws were in a position to provide a critique of what "Spain" was becoming, and what it meant to be Spanish in the sixteenth century. From Algiers, to Valladolid, Veracruz, Río de la Plata, São Vicente, and Homburg in Hesse, these biographies and autobiographies explored new concepts of self, of the sovereign, and of community through their inversions and distortions of State-sponsored accounts. At the same time, such biographies set forth new versions of historiographic "truth" and political utility. Gómara's *Crónica* questioned the efficacy of Charles V's rule by comparing him to the Ottoman Emperor, Suleiman the Magnificent, and his Grand Admiral Barbarossa, while suggesting that by using the enemies' more effective tactics, Charles V could secure Spain's political future. In his *Conquest of Mexico*, Gómara further dared to revise the centuries-old tradition of Spanish portrait books by replacing the collection of illustrious figures with one brilliant life—that of Cortés—and suggested a different understanding of emergent Spanish identity in imperial context. In turn, although Cabeza de Vaca paid homage to Charles V's ideals of sovereignty and Empire in an attempt to restore his reputation, he nonetheless showed

that the challenges to the practice of sovereignty, especially in the Americas, could not be captured solely by legal language, on which Spanish historiography depended to achieve legitimacy. Finally, Hans Staden's transatlantic life defied his Prince's political objectives against Charles V and destabilized European categories of self-understanding. By considering "unofficial" life writing alongside official *historia pro persona*, then, we gain a much richer understanding of the development of this historiographic subgenre, and its implications for political critique in Charles V's transatlantic Spanish Empire.

## CHAPTER 1

### Historian as Outlaw and Sovereign: Gómara's Lives of the Corsair-Kings Barbarossa

*Así, yo también escribiendo las maravillosas cosas de Cortés, quiero escribir los hechos de Barbarroja para darle compañero. ¿Quién podrá manifestar mejor[...]los robos, los sacos de pueblos quemados, la pérdida de infinitas galeras y naves, la sangre de inocentes cristianos derramada, la infinidad de cautivos que después que los Barbarrojas comenzaron, han hecho turcos y moros en Grecia, en Italia y principalmente en nuestra desventurada España?*

*[So, in order to give Cortés, whose marvelous feats I am already writing about, a companion, I now want to write the deeds of Barbarossa. Who else could possibly match what he knows of robbery, the sacking of scorched villages, the loss of infinite galleys and ships, the spilled blood of innocent Spanish, the endless stream of captives that, after the Barbarossas came on the scene, have become Turks and Moors in Greece, Italy, and first and foremost in our unfortunate Spain?] (15)*

-Francisco López de Gómara, Preface to *Crónica de los corsarios Barbarroja*

On November 17, 1553, Prince Philip II and the Council of the Indies outlawed the most famous work written by Francisco López de Gómara (1511-1559), *Historia de las Indias y la Conquista de México* [*History of the Indies and the Conquest of Mexico*] (Valladolid, 1552), placing a fine of 200,000 *maravedis*, a considerable quantity, on any copy printed or sold in the kingdoms, cities, or towns of Spain. Reading the work or having it in one's home incurred an additional fine of 10,000 *maravedis*. The public proclamation decreed that "no conviene quel dicho libro se venda ni lea ni se impriman más libros" [it is not suitable for the said book to be sold or read or more books printed]. The government followed the prohibition with a thorough investigation into the booksellers of Seville in 1554, searching for rogue copies of the work (Jiménez 292). After Gómara's death, the Council of the Indies issued a *cédula* [warrant] in September 1562, ordering the seizure of the historian's papers and manuscripts in Gómara's native province of Soria. The exact reasons for



this censorship and seizure, in effect until 1729, are not stated by the warrant.<sup>39</sup>

Gómara was a cleric and historian of humble origins, but given his ambitious histories of both the Americas and the Mediterranean, he was viewed as an independent thinker, and therefore dangerous to the Spanish State (Jiménez 2001: 293). Even though Gómara aspired to be one of Emperor Charles V's royal historians (*cronista real*), he always remained outside the inner circles of the sovereign. His strongest link to the Emperor's court was his friendship with the *cronista real* Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1494-1573), most famous for his opposition to Bartolomé de las Casas in the Valladolid debates of 1552, and for his publication of a treatise on just war theory, *Democrates Segundo*. Yet Gómara was effectively denied the right to narrate the new modes of Empire in Spain as official history, and was excluded from recognition—"fama"—in his struggle to historicize the fluctuating identities of sixteenth-century Spaniards. The historian never saw his works truly succeed. Instead, they languished: unpublished, censored, or circulated with a bounty on their head.

In this chapter, I examine Gómara's *Crónica de los muy nombrados Oruch y Jaradín Barbarroja* [*Crónica*]. Written originally in 1545, the *Crónica* remained in manuscript form until first published in 1853 and later, in 1989.<sup>40</sup> It narrates the lives of the legendary corsairs and "kings" of Algiers, the brothers 'Arūdī and Khayr al-

---

<sup>39</sup> See Jiménez (2001) pp. 292-303, for more details about various theories on Gómara's status as "outlaw" following this prohibition. She suggests it was Gómara's independent approach to historiography which provoked his censorship. Ramón Iglesia and Robert Lewis likewise attribute the censorship to Gómara's critiques of Charles V or praise of Hernán Cortés. It must be taken into account, however, as Juan Friede in his article "Censura" shows, that the Spanish Crown restricted publications on the Americas treating sensitive topics, including sexuality, religious practices, the *encomienda*, indigenous slavery, and so on. This policy was intended to protect Spain from the competing interests of other European powers. However, it is still not clear why all of Gómara's papers would have been seized if only his American works were considered compromising to the Crown's interests.

<sup>40</sup> The title of this work must be qualified in two respects. First, there are two distinct versions of the *Crónica*; see pg. 17 of this chapter for a full description of the versions. The 1989 version has the published title, *Crónica de los corsarios Barbarroja*. Because there is no English translation of this work, typically the Spanish title is still used in English language works, but it could be translated as *Chronicle of the Corsairs Barbarossa*. It should be kept in mind that this title is not necessarily an accurate generic classification, or even the title Gómara gave his own work, something we will explore.

Dīn<sup>41</sup> Barbarossa, within the context of the Hispano-Ottoman imperial conflicts in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean. Gómara conceived the *Crónica* as a parallel life to his planned biography of the conquistador of Mexico, Hernán Cortés. As such, it was the predecessor and intended companion work of his outlawed *History of the Indies and the Conquest of Mexico*. The *Crónica*'s subject made it, in the words of Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra, “una temeridad” [an act of temerity] (1987: 902). In the view of the risk-taking Gómara, history and life writing were capable of doing much more than merely reporting the facts or deeds of his subjects' lives. In this chapter, I show how Gómara creatively employs techniques of Renaissance Humanism, such as illusionism, in order to bring the infamous Barbarossa corsairs to life and to criticize Charles V. The controversial *Crónica* thus functions as a kind of political ‘virtual reality,’ wherein Gómara proposes history, and the historian, as effective replacements for the sovereign's inaction, or incapacity. Gómara's brand of life writing sought to materialize and make real the threats to, and the complexities of, imperial expansion from both within and without the Spanish Empire. By writing the lives of the Barbarossa brothers, the historian saw himself as doing what the sovereign King and Emperor was not doing—solving the crisis with the corsairs—because of lack of time and means.

For a historian who sought after a position as *cronista real*, this was a perhaps unadvisable subject to undertake. Robert Lewis notes the general conflict between Gómara's and the Crown's perspectives: “In daring to criticize the actions of the Emperor [...] the cleric could hardly expect that his history would be well received and approved in official circles” (323-4). While the *Crónica* highlights the role of humanist historiography as “conveniente a Príncipes y Reyes” [helpful to Princes and

---

<sup>41</sup> These names have various transliterations and divergent spellings. Gómara and his contemporaries wrote “Omiche” or “Oruch,” and “Jaradin” or “Hayreddin”. I have opted use the spellings from the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*: ‘Arūdī and K̲hayr al-Dīn.

Kings], as Charles V's royal historian Pedro Mexía put it, Gómara seems to exceed an ancillary position and posit the historian *as* sovereign. And although it wasn't uncommon that histories would detail the enemy—"conocer el enemigo es vencerle"—Gómara treats the Barbarossa brothers as *admirable*: examples worthy of imitation for their "ánimo" [spirit] and effective *Realpolitik*, along the lines of Machiavelli's New Prince. This was a rupture with the normal sort of advice given to European sovereigns, as in Erasmus' *Education of a Christian Prince*, dedicated to Charles V in 1516. Simply put, Gómara's chronicle of "los muy nombrados" [the very renowned] 'Arūdj (1473?- 1518) and Khayr al-Dīn (1478?-1546) Barbarossa brothers represented a new current in sixteenth-century Spanish historiography, given its engagement with the present, its bold vernacular narrative voice, and its unconventional theorization of the role of history and of the historian with respect to the sovereign in sixteenth-century Spain. In his *Crónica*, Gómara reveals the complex manifestations of political power in the Mediterranean arena and probes the consequences to Spain's imperial expansion as well as its emergent "proto-national" identity.

### *Birth of a Historian: Algiers, 1541*

Basic to the analysis of the *Crónica* is a discussion of historical background on the conflicts between Charles V and the Barbarossa brothers in the Mediterranean. This section traces, as well, Gómara's emergence as a historian of such tense political affairs following his participation as chaplain in Charles V's Algerian expedition in November 1541. The failure of this military operation seems to have left an indelible sensual impression on the humanist priest, who witnessed first-hand Spain's inability to take the city-state of Algiers from the Turkish-Algerian Regency and its *Kapudan*

*pasha* (Grand Admiral) Khayr al-Dīn Barbarossa, who was not even present at the time. Hasan Agha, a renegade who served as Barbarossa's lieutenant (*khalifa*), was left in charge of the city as governor while his master was in Constantinople (116). The Emperor's attack on Algiers—"cueva de corsarios y ladrones y lugar fuerte" [dungeon of corsairs and robbers and a strong post]—in 1541 was his third and final such endeavor to uproot this "tan ruin vecino" [terrible neighbor] (Gómara 1989: 114). An untimely tempest of hail and high winds resulted in the stunning and devastating destruction of the imperial fleet. Hundreds of ships, tens of thousands of men, along with horses and equipment, were all lost, to the great sorrow of the Emperor. At the Battle, which never truly got underway, Gómara observed the convergence of the Emperor, and the conquistador of Mexico and Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca, Hernán Cortés, and, as usual, speculation over Barbarossa's actual location. This unsuccessful Spanish military effort to defeat the enemy, dramatized the threats to, and inefficacies of, Charles V's defense of Empire. According to Nora Edith Jiménez, it was this experience which inspired Gómara to launch his career as a historian.

The Battle for Algiers, in truth, was not simply a clash between the Spanish and Barbarossa, but rather between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. In the sixteenth century, only the Ottoman Empire, which included Algiers as a *sanjak* (province) since 1519, was capable of matching the military and territorial might of Charles V's Empire. The Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, ruled the Ottomans from 1520-1566, and commanded great loyalty from his subjects. Both Empires were "political monsters" (Garcés 18) and no one knew for sure which would come to dominate Europe. The Ottomans had the upper hand until the 1570s and were considered "casi invencible" [nearly invincible], in the words of Gómara (112). Although Spain had "recovered" the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors with the fall of Granada in 1492, North Africa remained a frontier of the Reconquest. Coupled with

the Turkish campaigns along the Danube, the Ottoman alliance with the corsair and *Kapudan pasha* Barbarossa was extremely perilous for Spanish imperial ambitions, and indeed, for the integrity of the Peninsula itself.

Because of the prominence of Barbarossa in the Mediterranean, many Europeans had an interest in this corsair-cum-“king” and his elder brother, ‘Arūdj.<sup>42</sup> The exact nature of their origin was, and still is, uncertain.<sup>43</sup> In sixteenth-century Spain, the historians who chronicle the lives of the corsairs, including Gómara, Antonio de Sosa (attributed to Diego de Haedo), and Luis del Mármol Carvajal, all offer mutually contradictory accounts of their ancestry. Both the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and historian Svat Soucek, however, assert that the contemporary Turkish source, the *Gazavat-i Hayreddin Pasa*, contains the most reliable information. This text recounts how the Barbarossa brothers came from the island of Lesbos, and were most likely born to a Turkish father, who was a soldier, and a Greek mother. Numerous works of history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries offered their own versions of the corsairs’ early careers. One of these, known as *Topographia, e Historia general de Argel* (1612), is an excellent resource. Although published by Diego de Haedo under the name of his uncle (the archbishop of Palermo, Sicily, of the same name), the more likely author was Doctor Antonio de Sosa, a captive in Algiers and a great friend of Cervantes. The *Epítome de los reyes de Argel* [History of the Kings of Algiers], the second book of this five-volume work, reports on the life, death, and deeds of ‘Arūdj and *Khayr al-Dīn* Barbarossa, as does Mármol Carvajal in Book V of his *Descripción de África* (1573-99). The Italian historian Paolo Giovio<sup>44</sup> wrote

---

<sup>42</sup> This interest seems to have renewed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when several accounts were published. See the bibliography for the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 1995, 12 vol.) for bibliographic information.

<sup>43</sup> I am grateful to María Antonia Garcés for providing me with this bibliography of works related to the Barbarossa brothers and their origins.

<sup>44</sup> Jacques Lafaye (2001:131-142) has shown that Gómara considered Paolo Giovio (Paulo Jovio) both a model and a rival for his own writing. He was one of the few historians to focus on the current affairs of the Mediterranean at the same time as Gómara. Kagan (2009: 86-89) details Charles V’s embarrassment at Giovio’s portrayal of his Mediterranean conflicts with the Turks and the Emperor’s

about the Barbarossa brothers and the Ottomans (1483-1552), in his *Commentario de le cose de' Turchi* [*Turkish Chronicles*] (1531), *Gli elogi vite brevemente scritte d'hvomini illvstri di gverra, antichi et moderni* (1551), and *La prima parte dell' historie del suo tempo* (1551). The French historians Pierre de Brantôme and André Thevet also featured portrait-style lives of Barbarossa in their respective works, *Les vies des hommes illustres et des grands capitaines étrangers* (1600), and *Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres* (1584). The Turkish *Gazavat-i Hayreddin Pasa* was a panegyric dedicated to *Khayr al-Dīn*, written by Seyyid Murad under orders of Sultan Suleyman (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*). It was translated into Castilian in 1578 as the *Crónica del Guerrero de la fe Hayreddin Barbarroja* [Chronicle of the Warrior of the Faith, *Khayr al-Dīn Barbarossa*].<sup>45</sup> Fray Prudencio de Sandoval's *Historia de la vida y hechos del Emperador Carlos V* (1604-6) is another work of history that discusses Barbarossa at length; however, we know that most of his descriptions were directly plagiarized from Gómara (Gómara 1989: 60 n. 33).<sup>46</sup>

It is agreed that by 1504 'Arūdī was established in the Maghrib, at Goleta, with his brothers, *Khayr al-Dīn* and *Ishāq*. Through relentless corsair activity in support of local rulers, the brothers amassed wealth and a small fleet of privateering vessels and were able to establish bases in Tunis and Djerba. North African rulers required assistance in defending themselves from the Spanish, who then occupied various points on the coast of North Africa, notably Oran (1509), the Peñón of Algiers, *Bidjāya* (Bougie) and Tripoli (1510). In 1516, 'Arūdī seized control of Algiers.

---

attempt to censor the historian's work. One can imagine that if Giovio met with this much trouble, that Gómara would have surely seen his *Crónica* censored, if not prohibited entirely, if it had been published.

<sup>45</sup> This translation has recently been edited by Miguel Ángel de Bunes y Emilio Sola, eds., *La vida, y historia de Hayradin, llamado Barbarroja: Gazavat-i Hayreddin Pasa (la crónica del guerrero de la fe Hayreddin Barbarroja)* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Lafaye has compiled an exhaustive list of all books published in Europe in the sixteenth century that had to do with the Turks or Berbers. See *Sangrientas fiestas del Renacimiento*, pp. 175-180.

Through his political involvement, military prowess, and fierceness as a leader, ‘Arūdj won over the allegiance of local populations, and was able to conquer, subdue, and organize a large swath of North African territory with the help of Khayr al-Dīn, before the elder corsair’s death at Tlemcen in 1518.

Khayr al-Dīn was the more famous of the two brothers in Gómara’s time and was, like ‘Arūdj, referred to by the moniker “Barbarossa” based on the color of his beard.<sup>47</sup> He rose to prominence following his brother’s death, assuming the role as the ruler (*sulṭān*) of Algiers. Because of great instability in the region, Barbarossa promptly sought the protection of Ottoman Sultan Selim I, the predecessor of Suleiman the Magnificent, sending an embassy to him in 1519. In accepting the overlordship of Algiers, Selim provided 2,000 janissaries and artillery to help defend the territory from the Spanish Empire. This made Algiers a province of the Ottoman Sultan, and his name was stamped on the coins used in the city-State (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*). Barbarossa, as a result, became a *beylerbey*, or provincial governor, a term which translates to “commander of commanders.” This political arrangement was then known as the Turkish-Algerian Regency, and Algiers was the center of Ottoman power in the Maghrib. Barbarossa, however, soon faced an Algerian rebellion and coup, and was driven out of the city for several years while he gathered strength and supplies. He recovered Algiers in 1525, and remained in power as its governor and military commander. In 1529 he expelled the Spaniards from the *presidio* [fortress] known as the Peñón of Algiers, located on an island facing the city’s harbor. Barbarossa, who then began to collaborate more closely with the Ottoman Empire, both as a corsair and an envoy to the French King, Francis I, in 1533 received the title

---

<sup>47</sup> This may also have been a European corruption of ‘Arūdj’s Turkish nickname, “Baba ‘Arūdj” (Father ‘Arūdj) (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*).

of Grand Admiral and “*Beylerbey* of the Islands” from Suleiman the Magnificent (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*).

By the 1530s, Algiers began to flourish as a new kind of city-state. It captivated the European imagination, including that of Gómara who recorded his wonder and curiosity in witnessing the city’s ramparts from afar: “yo, que me hallé allí me maravillé” [I, who found myself there, marveled (at the scene)] (1979, II: 2). In the sixteenth century, Algiers was a frontier city, with a population of Berbers, Turks, Arabs, Jews, renegades, and Moors. It had served as a link between the medieval al-Andalus and the Arabic orient, and became both notable and notorious in the early modern period (Sola 1993: 13-14). The brothers Barbarossa, with their mixed heritage, were symbolic of Algiers on several levels: after seizing the city in 1516, they transformed it into a place where one could “prosper in a highly mobile society,” something unheard of in Europe (14). In the city, one would find renegades (those who had converted to Islam or become “Turk” by profession) from Russia, Bulgaria, Poland, France, Ireland, most provinces of Spain and Italy, Greece, Egypt, and even America (“Indians from the Indies of Portugal, of Brazil, and of New Spain”), among other regions (Sosa/Haedo, *Topografía* I, 52-53). This incredible diversity was without parallel in the Mediterranean world: it was a kingdom of otherness. Like Algiers itself, the lives of the Barbarossa brothers were characterized by “the legendary, the anecdotal, and the unreal” (Bunes Ibarra and Sola 12), thereby challenging Europeans to adequately represent them in historical writing.

In recognition of the weight of his foe’s allegiance to the Ottomans, Charles V had engaged in failed diplomatic negotiations with Barbarossa before the 1541 Algiers expedition, as confirmed by Jacques Lafaye: “it is so certain that the last of the brothers Barbarossa was the indisputable Lord of the Mediterranean, that even the emperor sent four secret diplomatic missions to him [...] in 1539 and 1540” (91).



Charles V had tried to ‘seduce’ Barbarossa away from Algiers by playing on his ambitions as a corsair, presenting him Tunis as a gift, and even offering to recognize him as “king” of Algiers and Tunis if he broke his alliance with the Sultan. But Barbarossa did not give in to this, or to various other offers of a similar nature (Hess 74). An attack by sea appeared to be the surest means to take Algiers, but resulted in Charles V’s greatest maritime defeat.

In the wake of the destruction wrought by the tempest, the Spaniards were faced with the great loss of life and goods, as well as the prospect of a severely weakened position in the Mediterranean. Under the circumstances, Hernán Cortés, along with his sons Luis and Martín, offered to capture Algiers on land— as Gómara puts it, “tomar a Argel con los soldados” [to take Algiers with the soldiers]— as if it were some displaced Tenochtitlán.<sup>48</sup> The aging conquistador found his offer rebuffed as Charles V decided to retreat from the battle. Cortés’s audacity in the face of the Emperor may have captured the imagination of Gómara, who intimates in the *Crónica* that the Emperor Charles V was too much in a hurry, and that, had he followed Cortés’s advice, the Spanish would have taken Algiers. The tension between sovereign and conquistador surrounding Charles V’s decision to retreat remains unresolved in Gómara’s account of the Battle. The complex negotiation of political power in the Mediterranean serves as one of the *Crónica*’s fundamental themes.

With the great losses to Charles V’s fleet, Barbarossa and the Great Turk continued to enjoy their stance as Spain’s “terrible neighbor.” The resulting danger to the Iberian Peninsula was, in Gómara’s view, unsustainable. For the historian, the outcome of the battle raises the question: who was most effective in imperial

---

<sup>48</sup> Cortés, whom we will recall as Barbarossa’s historiographical double or “companion,” had lost his priceless Aztec emeralds in the storm, perhaps sought to recover from this sense of loss. Additionally, as I explore in Chapter 2, Cortés had endured some ten years of “battles” with Charles V’s prosecutors, and his offer to take Algiers may be understood as an attempt to return to the Emperor’s good graces.

expansion and defense, Charles V, Cortés, or Barbarossa? How could a corsair, *Kapudan pasha* or not, and his crew refuse and defy the mandates of the “king of kings,” the heir of Caesar? Could Gómara urge the Emperor to embrace a more attentive and daring policy in the Mediterranean? And could the historian who was, in turn, a Spanish priest, manage the consequences when he opted to write a laudatory biography of one of Spain’s greatest enemies?

### *The Political Role of Life Writing*

The *Crónica* is divided into three sections: the preface and dedication to the Marquis of Astorga, Pedro Álvarez de Osorio, a member of Charles V’s court, whose son was engaged to Cortés’s daughter; Book One, the History of ‘Arūd̲j Barbarossa, preceded by a lineage of the Turkish kings; and Book Two, on *K̲hayr al-Dīn* Barbarossa. The preface, the most often-quoted part of the *Crónica*, was most likely written last. As Kathleen Myers explains, in another context, these opening addresses were meant to be:

a guide, a key for understanding textual issues—both direct and indirect—such as the author’s role, sources, and practical concerns. During the Renaissance, the preface held a prominent place in the makeup of a text. There the author usually revealed the basic parameters of the work: the patron/addressee(s), the genre type and its specific rhetorical conventions, the purpose of the text, and the place of enunciation[...] it is here that the author establishes his ongoing dialogue with the reader (27).

Gómara’s preface meets and exceeds these criteria, offering a lengthy discussion of the generic problems of writing history in times of political crisis. As such, it helps us understand the historian’s seemingly paradoxical choice to write the lives of Spain’s enemies with unconcealed admiration, while stridently criticizing the very king who would have been responsible for appointing him *cronista real* in his court.

Described as an “*obrilla, así hecha de presto*” [minor work, composed in a

hurry], the *Crónica* was nonetheless written in keeping with the ideals of Renaissance Humanistic historiography in which Gómara was formally trained during the decade he spent in Italy, from 1530-1541. He studied at the *Colegio de San Clemente de los Españoles* in Bologna in the 1530s, a center of historiography with an excellent library, as well as through his residence in the home of the Spanish ambassador, Hurtado de Mendoza, in the frontier city of Venice from 1539-1541. Hurtado de Mendoza had amassed a rich library, most of which came to be part of the Escorial library in the sixteenth century. Much of the library was in Greek or Latin, and included tomes dealing with mathematics, physics, moral philosophy, and metaphysics. Prior to 1540, it would have included works by Livy, Polybius, Suetonius, Quintilian, Tacitus, Thucydides, Cicero, Pliny, Ptolemy, Dante, Luis Vives and even Paolo Giovio's *Commentary on the Turks* (1531) (Jiménez 2000: 37). Jiménez asserts that Gómara would have certainly read these works, as his *Crónica* suggests, and may have even served as a copier of manuscripts while living at Hurtado de Mendoza's home.

In the *Crónica*, Gómara seeks to create a historical discourse that not only faithfully represents the past, but also is politically vital in the present. Both Richard Kagan and Alfredo Alvar signal this "preoccupation with one's own society and time period" as one of the primary methodological innovations of sixteenth-century Spanish historians (Kagan 1995; Alvar 230). Many of Gómara's contemporaries, however, feared to write about the present when the sovereign was involved. Even at the beginning of the seventeenth century, official historians balked at the idea of revealing the truth of contemporary events and people. As the *cronista real* Juan de Mariana (1536-1624) wrote in his *Historia de España* (1609), "No me atrevía a pasar más adelante y relatar las cosas modernas, por no lastimar a algunos si se decía verdad, ni faltar al deber si la disimulaba" [I didn't dare go ahead and tell about

modern things, so as not to do harm to anyone if I were to tell the truth, nor fail my duty if I were to hide it] (cited in Alvar 230). Telling the truth, after all, “es la primera ley de la historia” [the first law of History], in the words of Mariana. For Gómara, the present time was the right time; this was his sense of the opportune nature (*kairos*) of recollecting Barbarossa’s achievements at that moment, 1545, and in Valladolid, then the seat of the Spanish court.

Gómara’s preface builds a case for the text’s objective—bringing the renowned Barbarossa corsairs to life—through the use of pathos, a mode of persuasion that appeals to the audience’s emotions. The author fuses passion with striking, appropriate diction and syntax in order to affect the will of the reader. He does this in keeping with Ciceronian principles of oratory and Quintilian’s maxim that history should delight, teach, and move. The cleric lists the horrific tragedies that have befallen Spain at the hands of the Turks and of the Barbarossa brothers, exclaiming, “¡Oh grande y desigual mal! ¡Oh afrenta que por ninguna vía se enmienda! Tanto más lloro estas cosas cuanto mayor es el daño y menor el remedio” [Oh great and unequalled evil! Oh, loss that cannot be remedied! The more I cry over these things, the greater is the damage and farther away the solution] (15). He here attempts to evoke bodily pain, such that the text “wounds” [lastima] the reader (16).

The suffering that Gómara conveys in his preface was not merely a rhetorical invention without any referent, and he was probably familiar with some of the first-hand accounts behind the *diplomática* [State correspondence] related to corsair activity from this period. Usually sent to Charles V, documents such as *avisos* [spy reports] and *memoriales* [memorandums] articulated the coastal populations’ very real worries about having enough *bizcocho y pólvora* [food and munitions] to survive the constant and sudden attacks from Barbarossa’s fleet. These documents portrayed the corsair as a kind of spectral presence, rumored to be about, but rarely able to actually

be located. Fernand Braudel echoes this reality of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean: “Corsair activity is not a private activity of one mere group, and one cannot point to a sole responsible or guilty person. It is endemic. Everyone, the destitute and the powerful, rich people and poor people, cities, noblemen, States [...] are tangled in the mesh of a net stretched from end to end of the Mediterranean, and all along all its shores” (II, 1972: 287). This metaphor of a network of violence, involving everyone, lends itself to a more accurate understanding of the “flux of human event and character” that sixteenth-century humanists were confronting in their attempts to write history (Struever 37). Gómara’s series of despondent cries reflect how these corsair brothers had created an all-pervasive, diffuse force of terror through their pirate activity.

The historian warns his reader, however, that mere affect is not the solution for Spain’s crisis with Barbarossa, although it is needed for the reader to acknowledge the urgency of the situation. Instead, action must be taken, and Gómara is ready to propose at least part of what must be done, following his assertion that the Barbarossa brothers were the pinnacle of Spain’s history of suffering destruction and terror:

No hicieran tanto mal a España los griegos y romanos que sacaron todo el oro y plata que en ella hallaron y descubrieron, cuanto los Barbarrojas han hecho [...] más prisioneros y más cautivos han llevado de nuestra España los corsarios de cuarenta años a esta parte que en ochocientos años antes

[The Greeks and Romans, who took all of the gold and silver out of Spain, didn’t do so much harm to Spain as the Barbarossas did. (...) These corsairs, in forty years, have taken more prisoners and more captives from our Spain than in the previous 800 years] (15).

In forty years Barbarossa had done more damage than the Moors did in 800 years, despite the fact that these earlier enemies “destroyed all of Spain.” The historian follows this hyperbolic passage with a question that reveals the crux of his purpose in writing the corsairs’ lives:

pues, ¿si esto importa tanto a nuestra nación para ver y tentar si habría algún medio o remedio a tanto azotes, males y desventuras que vienen por ventura por

nuestros males y pecados, *por qué no los escribirá y publicará quien lo entiende y siente y quien se duele?*

[well, if this is so important to our nation, to try to see if there might be some means or solution to so many whippings, evils and misfortunes that come, perhaps, because of our evils and sins, *why doesn't someone who knows and feels this, and who is pained by this, write and publish (about the situation)?*] (my emphasis)

Someone, Gómara insists, needs to *write* this, to *publish* this; he points out that Charles V, burdened by other wars fueled by the Reformation in Europe, is unable to remedy the problem, try as he might. The historian, then, must stand in for the sovereign: he shows that at least part of the solution to the problem of Barbarossa is writing his history, as lives, “sin haber de fingir mentiras o verosimilitudes” [without having to pretend with lies or likenesses] (16). Staking his life and livelihood on rendering Barbarossa’s life visible for his Spanish readership, Gómara took great risks in his choice of subject and vivid, encomiastic mode of historiography of Spain’s adversaries.

*“Two ways of writing history”: Whose Life, Whose History?*

In his life of Barbarossa, Gómara presented the most lucid and coherent materialization of Spain’s enemy that he could offer. However, the preface to the *Crónica* reveals the historian’s conception of the work as somewhere *between* a “history” and a “life” [*vida*], never committing fully to either discursive type. When the historian calls his work “un pedazo de la vida de Barbarroja” [a piece of the life of Barbarossa], in this preface (13-14), Gómara refers to the fact that *Crónica* is an outgrowth of the compendium *Guerras de Mar del Emperador de Carlos V* [Sea Wars of Emperor Charles V],<sup>49</sup> which features a collection of portraits of famous mariners and an annalistic catalog of sea battles, including those involving the Barbarossa

---

<sup>49</sup> *Guerras de mar*, composed circa 1540-1550, remained unpublished until 2000.

brothers (Jiménez 2001: 99). This suggests that the “piece” was developed and elaborated expressly *as* a life, not a compendium of historical events and personages in the same vein as its parent work.

The preface to the *Crónica*, both “eloquent” and “perplexing,” submerges the reader in terminology related to sixteenth-century historiography and Renaissance Humanism, and shows the instability of these categories (Garcés 2002: 22). The first paragraph of the *Crónica* is arguably the most famous passage from this work. Nevertheless, as Carmen Saén de Casas stresses in her analysis of Gómara’s life writing in the *Annals of Charles V*, there are two differing versions of this opening passage: a) the *Biblioteca Nacional* manuscript 6339 version, inaccurately published in 2002 (Algazara); and b) the *Memorial histórico* version, which was edited from a later manuscript of the Real Academia (9/1080), published by Don José Rodríguez in 1853, and modernized in 1989 (Polifemo). This version, however, was merged, “as convenient,” with the earlier Ms. 6339 (69). Despite the absence of an adequately edited and published version of this text, I will attempt to look at some important differences between them in this opening paragraph, which I quote in its entirety. I first consider the 1989 Polifemo version, because it is better known and more widely diffused:

Dos maneras hay, muy ilustre Señor, de escribir historias; la una es cuando se escribe la vida, la otra cuando se cuentan los hechos de un emperador, o valiente capitán. De la primera usaron Suetonio Tranquillo, Plutarcho, San Jerónimo y otros muchos. De aquella otra es el común uso que todos tienen de escribir, de la cual para satisfacer al oyente bastará relatar solamente las hazañas, guerras, victorias y desastres del capitán: en la primera se han de decir todos los vicios de la persona de quien se escribe; verdadera y descubiertamente ha de hablar el que escribe vida; no se puede bien escribir la vida del que aun no es muerto; las guerras y grandes hechos muy bien, aunque esté vivo. Las cosas de los demás excelentísimos capitanes que ahora hay [...], he emprendido de escribir, no sé si mi ingenio llegará a su valor, ni si mi pluma alcanzará donde su lanza: pondré a lo menos todas mis fuerzas en contar sus guerras. Ninguno me reprehenda al presente, si dijere algo o echare menos alguna cosa en esta mi escritura, pues no escribo vida, sino historia, aunque pienso, si los alcanzare de días, de escribir asimismo sus vidas. (13)

[Your very illustrious lordship, there are two ways of writing history, one when you write the life and the other when you recount the deeds of an emperor or of some valiant captain. The first method was used by Suetonius Tranquillus, Plutarch, Saint Jerome, and many others. The other kind is the one now in common use which all write to satisfy the reader and in which it is sufficient to relate only the heroic feats, victories, and defeats of the captains. In the first method you have to tell about the vices of the person of whom you are writing, in fact, whoever writes a life has to speak clearly and openly. You cannot write a good life of a man who is not yet dead, but you can speak of the wars and his great deeds even though he be alive. The affairs of the other most excellent captains who today are living [...] I have attempted to write, and although I do not know whether my talent is equal to my valor nor whether my pen will reach to where it is directed, I will put at least all my power into telling about their wars. No one can criticize me at present if I should say something or omit something in this work of mine, for I am writing not a life but a history, although I also expect to write their lives if I live long enough (Wagner 270)].

This self-reflexive excerpt, a species of *artes historicae*, demonstrates Gómara's crisis over categories of history writing. As a humanist, he felt compelled to classify his work, even as the meanings of such varieties of historiography were constantly shifting throughout the early modern period. His objective, however, is to equal the deeds of the great captains he writes about, with the force of his prose. As a priest by familial obligation, Gómara's only weapon was historiography. Such an assertion regarding these captains, then, is significant, in consideration of Gómara's later proposal that the historian is a viable substitute for the sovereign's inefficacies.

Per the criteria that the historian sets forth here, if one is to write a "life," the subject must already have died, and one must discuss all his virtues, vices, and customs, along with his deeds. Because Khayr al-Dīn was still alive in 1545 (he would die the following year), Gómara couldn't properly refer to his history as *vida*. This would not, moreover, exclude 'Arūdj's "history" from being a "life." Perhaps by "*vida*", the historian refers to the portrait-style of writing then in common practice, which implied an emphasis on character. In a lengthier or more detailed history of a particular person, however, better described as *historia pro persona* or "De Res gestae" [on the great deeds], the subject could still be alive, and the historian focused on the subject's actions, wars, and great accomplishments. As can be seen in these



brief definitions, there was overlap between these types of life writing, especially in that Gómara also notes that he eventually plans to write the *vidas* of these “great captains of our time,” if he lives long enough. His uncertainty and wavering demonstrates that, in his view, these types are not absolutely opposed to one another. As I suggested above, his “history” of ‘Arūdj Barbarossa, who died in 1518, conforms to the general criteria of a *vida*. On the other hand, his book on *Khayr al-Dīn* emphasizes deeds and battles, while still discussing the corsair’s virtues and vices. And both of these works are constantly woven back into the present, as Gómara’s materialization of their lives – or deeds – seeks political relevance.

The Ms. 6339 version of the above cited passage differs somewhat, especially in that it doesn’t name a classical genealogy of writers, although it does comment on classical practices of writing history. In this version, Gómara specifies the kind of subject appropriate to historiography: “un emperador, príncipe, capitán o filósofo” [an emperor, prince, captain, or philosopher]. We should also note that, here, Gómara contrasts life writing with the writing of wars and victories, which he doesn’t name specifically as History, but only one *kind* of history that can be written: “Yo no escribo al presente vidas sino guerras, no cuento costumbres sino vitorias” [At present, I write not lives but wars; I relate not customs but victories]. In sum, both of these versions of the preface reflect that, as a historian experimenting with the flexible form of life writing, Gómara’s primary concerns include whether to place emphasis on character or deeds, and how to write the life of a person who is still alive. Although Gómara may begin his inquiry into these issues fairly conventionally, rooting his observations in classical texts, by the end of the preface, it is clear that his use of illusionism and other rhetorical techniques manipulates tradition for his own political motives.

Both versions of the opening of the *Crónica* have clear classical referents, most notably from Plutarch’s *Lives*. Gómara uses nearly the same wording as Plutarch’s

introduction to the parallel lives of Alexander the Great and Caesar, thereby demonstrating the intertextuality of the *Crónica* with this foundational text of life writing (Saen de Casas 71). In effect, Plutarch attempts to establish a generic distinction between life writing and historiography, which was more acceptable in his time. First of all, he states that a life may be represented through historical moments, rather than as a comprehensive continuity:

It being my purpose to write the lives of Alexander the king, and of Caesar, by whom Pompey was destroyed, the multitude of their great actions affords so large a field that I were to blame if I should not by way of apology forewarn my reader that I have chosen rather to epitomize the most celebrated parts of their story, than to insist at large on every particular circumstance of it.

Plutarch explains this by reminding his reader that “It must be borne in mind that my design is not to write histories, but lives,” somewhat of the reverse of what Gómara waveringly states. Yet Plutarch clearly gives precedence to *character* over *deeds* when he states that

the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men; sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles whatsoever.

The purpose of the “life,” according to Plutarch, was more exemplary and didactic; character, therefore, outranked deeds. The Greek historian offers his reader an ekphrastic metaphor to support his mode of life writing:

Therefore as portrait-painters are more exact in the lines and features of the face in which the character is seen, than in the other parts of the body, so I must be allowed to give my more particular attention to the marks and indications of the souls of men, and while I endeavor by these to portray their lives, may be free to leave more weighty matters and great battles to be treated of by others (234-35).

This connection to the notion of the portrait is also a very important metaphor in the Spanish tradition of life writing. Still, it also reveals some important differences between Plutarch’s *Lives* and Gómara’s, even though both were “parallel” in some way. Perhaps most significantly, Gómara does not see life writing and historiography as absolutely opposed; instead, writing lives is one of many possible discursive types

available to the history writer, a branch from the principal trunk (Saen de Casas 72). In choosing to write the “chronicle” of the Barbarossa brothers as somewhere between “histories” and “lives,” Gómara would have placed the corsairs on a par with those captains and leaders, such as Charles V, who merited extended biographies, while also insisting on the political relevance of his work to Spain’s future policies in the Mediterranean.

*The Temerity of Parallel Lives: Outlaws and National Identity*

Perhaps one reason Gómara was so tentative in his characterization of his *Crónica* was the very dangerous nature of his chosen subject matter. His preface, as it turns out, also inquires into what kind of truth and exemplarity is expected of life writing, and how it may affect the further creation of the State and proto-nation of Spain, under Charles V. Gómara’s “temerity” in his choice to write about the Barbarossa brothers was not confined to his exaltation of corsairs as worthy of appreciation; instead, it had to do with the kind of parallel lives he was willing to hazard. It is worth recalling here that the historian had planned to pair the Barbarossa brothers with the Emperor in the *Crónica*’s parent work, *Guerras de Mar del Emperador Carlos V*, by entitling it “*los Barbarrojas*” (Gómara 2000: 53), even as he chronicled the confrontations between Spain and the rulers of Algiers. Upon advice from the Emperor’s official historian Sepúlveda, however, Gómara desisted and changed the title. The cleric, however, insisted on setting forth another daring parallel in the *Crónica*: “Así, yo también escribiendo las maravillosas cosas de Cortés, quiero escribir los hechos de Barbarroja para darle compañero” [In this manner, while writing the marvelous matters of Cortés, I want to write the deeds of Barbarossa to give him a companion] (15). These bold equations of Cortés and Barbarossa probably shocked

the reader.<sup>50</sup> While the conquistador's controversies and legal problems following his conquest of Mexico, which I will explore in Chapter Two, were well-known throughout Europe, many considered him a national hero of Spain. Cortés had become in any case, a member of the nobility as a result of Charles V's recognition of his conquests, bearing the title of Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca. What were the implications of Gómara's parallel for Spain's emerging sense of national identity?

By dedicating the *Crónica* to the Marquis of Astorga, a member of the aristocracy very important to the consolidation of Spain as a nation—one of the illustrious Castilians—Gómara perhaps attempted to show that his work was not intended to be subversive. The cleric was well aware of the controversial quality of his subject matter, and in his preface he reveals that he was disturbed by his peers' criticisms of his unorthodox approach to the corsair-rulers: “me tachan dos cosas en esta obra, aconsejándome que ni la debía hacer, ni hecha enviar a V.S.<sup>a</sup> Ilustrísima” [they criticize me about two things in this work, advising me that I shouldn't even write it, nor, once written, send it to Your Excellency] (14). The most troubling censure was that, since Gómara was a Christian and a Spaniard, he shouldn't write a history about Turks and corsairs. Confronting this critique, Gómara claims that “Algo perplejo y dudoso me tuvo por algunos días este consejo, y aun me entibió harto; pero en fin no pudo enfriar el calor y deseo que tengo [para escribir]” [This piece of advice made me feel perplexed and doubtful for some days, and even tempered my passion quite a bit; but in the end, I could not cool the heat and desire I have (to write)] (14). Throughout his dedication to the Marquis, the historian skillfully weaves the

---

<sup>50</sup> We must be aware also of Cortés's relationship to the dedicatee of Gómara's preface, the Marquis of Astorga, whose son was engaged to Cortés's daughter, María, even though the planned nuptials weren't going well. In the eleventh clause of Cortés's will, he orders that the agreement with the Marquis, regarding the marriage of Alvar Pérez Osorio to Cortés's daughter, María, be fulfilled. Cortés's relationship to the Marquis of Astorga appears to have been extremely troubled. According to Bernal Díaz, the turmoil of the marriage's failure directly contributed to the death of Cortés in 1546, from the excess of anger he experienced over it.

“murmurings” of his contemporaries into a meta-discourse of “heat” and “emotion” designed to deflect their arguments through pathos. Written as it was during “la siestas de los grandes calores,” the *Crónica* attempts to incite a corresponding heat in his reader, a heat recalled by Gómara’s mention of the “sangre española” [Spanish blood] the corsairs spilled in their horrifying attacks on Spain.

In his own defense, Gómara lists numerous canonical precedents for his *Crónica*, including saints and clerics who wrote about wars and “acontecimientos de sus tiempos” [events of their times] (15), and thus dismissing the idea that contemporary or foreign affairs were inappropriate topics for Spanish historiography. He directly states that these writers of antiquity, part of the Humanist library, wrote not only about their own nations, “mas aun también de las bárbaras y extranjeras” [but also about the barbarous and foreign nations] (15). By situating himself in a chain of historical traditions related to nationhood and *translatio studii*, Gómara exalts and exonerates himself at once. Most importantly, he mentions Saint Jerome, asserting that he wanted only to write about “los varones ilustres” [illustrious men], but ended up writing about heretics and infidels, as did Seneca the 1st (15).

Nonetheless, the concerns and criticisms of Gómara’s fellow historians with regards to his choice of subject material were reasonable. As I discussed in the Introduction, in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Spain, life writing was considered not only powerful but also potentially dangerous. The Spanish State and Empire relied heavily on the historian’s work for a narrative concept of *natio*, particularly through the *historia pro persona* of Charles V. As such, Gómara’s choice to write the life of the Emperor’s rival in the Mediterranean could have been seen as an affront to this duty of historiography. Gómara’s readership may have perceived that Charles V’s integrity could be placed into question by the historian’s apparent exaltation of one of Spain’s greatest foes. Even though the cleric seems to have supported the

centralization of the State, as well as imperial expansion, he wasn't interested in merely writing about "illustrious Castilians." In his view, only by knowing the enemy could Spain truly know itself, and more importantly, protect itself. Ultimately, he wished to use his writing to further Spain's causes, but his methods were unorthodox and perhaps misunderstood.

Towards the end of this preface, Gómara expresses additional concern over his work being misinterpreted and connected to the lineage of "brutish animality" rather than to that of natural reason possibly bringing shame upon the Castilian noblemen of the house of Trastámara, such as his patron. Nonetheless, he continues to stand by his project: "yo a lo menos nunca arrepentiré de haber escrito de Cortés, ni aun de Barbarroja tampoco, en cuya historia, muy ilustre Señor, pienso satisfacer a V.S. y a mi oficio contando llanamente las cosas" [I, at least, will never regret having written about Cortes, nor even about Barbarossa, in whose story, my illustrious Sir, I intend to satisfy both you and my vocation, telling things as they are] (16). Yet telling things "as they are" is a complex task in itself. Gómara's statements invite us to more closely examine his textual strategies for representing the lives of the Barbarossa brothers, both to demonstrate their threat to Spain, and to show how the historian could fulfill the role of "virtual prince," as Michel De Certeau suggests in another context (1988: 8), to resolve the crisis with the corsairs.

### *Illusionism in the Crónica*

The tale of Barbarossa's life— how he rose from a simple merchant's son to the *beylerbey* of Algiers and Grand Admiral of the Ottoman Fleet, a social mobility unheard of in Europe but epitomized by Algiers—was a story everyone wanted to hear and many sought to understand. Undoubtedly, Gómara was deeply attracted to this

idea, as he too was of humble origins, yet armed with powerful political ideas and ideals that he wished to put in effect as a historian. At the end of his history of ‘Arūdj Barbarossa, Gómara summarizes the corsair’s transformation:

bien que de un hombre barquero, cómitre y timonero, vino a tener una galera y cuatro fustas suyas y a ser capitán de otras, y más que de jornalero y aun de ganapán vino a ser rey de Argel y de Tenez y también de Tremecén: de tan bajo principio encumbró su nombre y fama en lo que hoy la tiene.

[It’s well enough that a seaman, galley-slave driver and helmsman, came to own a galley and four galliots and to be captain of others, and beyond a day-laborer and practically a beggar, came to be king of Algiers and of Tenez and also of Tlemcen: from such a humble beginning he raised his name and fame to the height that they enjoy today] (61).

This concluding statement encapsulates Gómara’s approach to the overall narrative of the *Crónica*. As a consequence of his choice of plot, however, the historian appears to subjugate his moral sense, didactic purpose, and even his allegiance to the Spanish Crown to an ideology of admiration. The storyline of the Barbarossa brothers’ rise to power provides narrative unity for Gómara’s *Crónica*, even though it is divided into two separate “histories.” Apart from this plot’s individualist appeal, Barbarossa’s achievements allowed Gómara to question the character of an effective (although certainly not ideal) political leader. As it turns out, the historian employs his signature technique of illusionism to enhance the motif of the corsairs’ social mobility.

Some background on the importance of illusionism, or *enargeia*, in Spanish historiography in the sixteenth century needs to be explained. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle outlined the role of this group of figures aimed at lively, visual description of an action, event, person or condition. Among these, I can name *characterismus*, a description of a person’s character; *topographia*, a description of a place; and *effictio*, a verbal description of someone’s body (Silva Rhetoricae). Together, the figures of *enargeia* “intended to construct a credible image which will take the audience into the presence of an object by attempting to place things before the eyes” (Sharpling 173).

This technique constituted the means of the historian of transferring living experience into language, espoused in the classic period by Quintilian, and, in the sixteenth century, by Erasmus (174). If history was to be *magistra vitae*, and a guide for the king, then mere abstractions would not serve; the historian had to “paint” a verisimilar picture in order to transmit the truth (73).<sup>51</sup> From illusion, the historian sought to move the reader to insight; from figure, he created conditions for critical analysis (89). In providing a vivid description of the Barbarossa brothers, Gómara almost manages to bring them to life, and thus was able to create an attractive history. At the same time, *enargeia* was an apt method for attempting to illustrate a political threat, while conserving objectivity (Slater 217). As such, Gómara’s use of these rhetorical figures supports his political purpose as set forth in the preface.

An emphasis on rhetoric, no matter how effective, was controversial in the sixteenth century. In his preface, Gómara is careful to state that he intends to tell the histories of the Barbarossa brothers “llanamente” [simply], creating a discourse that seeks to reveal truth through the correspondence of language to phenomena and events. He explicitly grounds his approach in “razón,” rather than in “opinión,” establishing that his use of figurative language is not intended to construct or invent a separate reality, as in poetry, but to make actual experience more accessible to his reader. Because history’s central tenet was adherence to the truth, many considered rhetoric potentially deceitful. Renaissance humanists created a new version of a classic debate, which extended back to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Struever 29). From the perspective of early modern historians, who increasingly sought information from first-hand or archival sources, Gómara’s reliance on rhetoric ran the risk of *subordinating* truth (Kohut 2009: 176). Instead, he leaned towards the Ciceronian

---

<sup>51</sup> According to Paul Julian Smith, *enargeia* in Golden Age Spain was “a rhetoric not of communication (relative and determinate) but of presence (absolute and integral)” (45).



truism that truth is only politically effective when affective. He treated as axiomatic the maxim that “eloquence, not knowledge, is power” (Struever 72). As such, we may interpret Gómara’s stress on rhetoric *as* an interest in power. He aimed for the force and clarity of his vernacular prose to awaken the Emperor to the gravity of the threats facing him, and to lead him to embrace Gómara as his visionary— and official— historian.

Gómara attempts to indicate the present danger of corsair warfare in the Mediterranean by “conjuring” the Barbarossa brothers and their deeds for his reader. The historian’s vivid language dramatizes, for example, the Spanish losses at the Battle of Algiers of 1541: “La pérdida fue grande, así por la plata, joyas y vestidos, armas y cosas semejantes, como por tantos navíos y buena artillería y por los caballos que los nuestros comieron y mataron” [The loss was great, as much for the silver, jewels, and clothing, arms and similar items, as for the ships and good artillery and for the horses that the Spanish ate and killed] (115). Lafaye remarks that Gómara’s historiography shows he was “a curious hunter of strange objects [and] new sensations” (103). Through his use of the incantatory rhetorical figure of *enargeia*, Gómara persuades his reader of the importance of Spain’s conflict with Barbarossa without straying into excessive emotion. His control of language and image reinforce the central place of the historian in mediating, or even resolving, the grave conflict between Spain and the Barbary corsairs.

Let us now rejoin the main plot of Gómara’s histories of ‘Arūdj and Khayr al-Dīn: the corsairs’ rise to power in the Mediterranean at Spain’s expense. On the whole, the author follows the model of Suetonius in his approach to life writing, in that he reveals all virtues and vices of his subject, and fuses character with deeds. Renaissance humanists trusted the reader to draw an appropriate conclusion from the material without the historian’s overt instruction. Gómara’s use of *enargeia* enhances

his choice of primary plot by rendering the corsairs' deeds more vivid. One salient example is his description of the Spanish loss of the Peñón of Algiers to Barbarossa in 1529. This historical event was not only a blow to Spanish power in North Africa, but it displayed Barbarossa's merciless character: "De ciento y cincuenta españoles que eran, los veinte y cinco quedaron vivos, cautivos y malheridos, y con pesar porque vivían" [Of the hundred and fifty Spanish that were there, only twenty five remained alive, captive and wounded, and with grief because they still lived] (82). Gómara graphically portrays the triumphant *Khayr al-Dīn* as a "carnicero y cruel" [a cruel butcher] towards the Spanish: "enterrábolos vivos, dejando los brazos y cabeza fuera, y hacía a muchos de a caballos que los atropellasen" [he buried captured Spaniards alive, leaving their arms and head free, and trampled many of them with horses] (85). The historian illustrates Barbarossa's *actions* as "tan cruel como nueva," [as cruel as they were new], and invites the reader to deduce the relevance of his character to his political and military efficacy.

Only in his representation of 'Arūdj's youth can Gómara be said to deviate from a Suetonian approach to biography, and establish character exclusive of deeds. In part, the historian must do this to pinpoint certain admirable aspects of 'Arūdj's personality that would later fuel his success, especially the term "ánimo" [spirit, courage, intention]. The *Crónica*'s depiction of the young Barbarossa traveling with his father, peddling wares by boat, is an ironic miniature of what the great corsair and "king" would eventually become: "Oruch era hombre de ánimo: o por no ver y sufrir tanta miseria como su padre y hermanos pasaban, o porque su espíritu le diese grandes cosas, [...] fuese a Constantinopla" ['Arūdj was a man of drive: or, so as not to go through and suffer so much misery as his fathers and brothers, or because his spirit gave to him such great things, [...] he went to Constantinople] (36). There he found

employment as a *cómitre*, or galley-slave driver, and after a time was captured on the seas by the Christian Knights of Rhodes.

In his narration of ‘Arūdj’s escape from this captivity, Gómara demonstrates how the Suetonian approach is elevated by illusionism: “tuvo un cuchillo con que se cortó el talon del pie donde llevaba la cadena, y cortado, sacóse la cadena y echóse al agua y salió a tierra nadando” [he had a knife with which he cut his Achilles’ heel of the foot where he was chained, and, once cut, freed himself from the chain, hurled himself from the ship into the water and swam to shore] (38). Although Gómara does not explicitly call him brave or daring, the reader can easily infer this aspect of ‘Arūdj’s character, given his act of self-laceration and the unknown outcome of his escape. The historian then “paints” Barbarossa as poor and alone: “andábase por Constantinopla triste, pobre y desnudo, y ganando de comer a jornal” [he wandered through Constantinople sad, poor, and naked, and earning enough to eat day-to-day] (38). Following this period of adversity, ‘Arūdj, began to serve as a galley helmsman in the Great Turk’s fleet. The corsair’s skill as a seaman translated into opportunity and social position. After one of the leaders of the galley expedition died from illness, Barbarossa’s chance to seize power arose. Gómara compactly sketches how ‘Arūdj bribed the crew and enacted his crime of ambition:

Como fue noche se acostó el señor de la galera y se durmió. Barbarroja en viendo que dormía, le dio con una hacha que llevaba, tres o cuatro golpes en las sienes y le mató; muerto le echó a la mar llamó a los soldados y marineros que tenía sobornados, y se apoderó de la galera y se alzó con ella y con el bergantín.

[As soon as it was nighttime, the owner of the galley went to bed and fell asleep. Barbarossa, seeing that he was sleeping, hit him three or four times on his temples with a hatchet that he carried, and killed him; once he was dead, Barbarossa tossed him overboard into the sea, called the soldiers and seamen that he had bribed, and took over the galley, making off with it and the bergantine] (39)

The historian follows this forceful illustration with a minimally didactic commentary, noting somewhat ambiguously that, although Barbarossa got his start through an act of

betrayal, “desde tan mal principio han venido los Barbarrojas a la grandeza, nombre y reputación que hoy tienen” [from such a bad beginning the Barbarossa brothers have come to the greatness, renown, and reputation that they enjoy today] (40). Masterfully creating suspense through this adherence to a unifying plot, Gómara entices the reader to await the details of Barbarossa’s known rise to power in the Mediterranean. At the same time, Gómara is able to chronicle the character and deeds of his protagonist. With approbation, he asserts that for ‘Arūdj to ascend to greatness, he had to defy the limits placed on him by the enemy: the chains on his body. What’s more, the corsair had to go beyond what the average person would do for fame and power, resonating with Machiavelli’s description of the New Prince. Barbarossa’s willingness to transgress would turn the Mediterranean world on its head: in Gómara’s view, the outlaw was truly capable of changing the world. Indeed, he implies that to achieve prominence and fame, one must be ruthless in some sense. ‘Arūdj, despite being an infidel, embodies the necessary *virtù* to achieve effective power and defy even the *invictissimus Caesar*, Charles V.

The second book of the *Crónica*, devoted to *Khayr al-Dīn*, continues with the established plot, towards the second Barbarossa’s rise to the status of “el mayor corsario y mejor capitán de mar que jamás ha habido y más y mejores cosas ha hecho sobre agua” [the greatest corsair and best sea-captain that there ever was and has accomplished the most and best things on water] (120)—these are Gómara’s concluding words. In this section, the historian often illustrates the corsair’s interior state: an important facet of knowing the enemy. He elucidates devious aspects of *Khayr al-Dīn*’s persona, as well as his sentiments, by interpreting and representing his subjective response to events and characters. This attempt to reveal Barbarossa’s psychology in order to fuse both character and deed is an avant-garde aspect of Gómara’s historical writing within the context of Renaissance Humanism, as he

strives for greater and greater verisimilitude in historical prose. Though the text offers numerous examples, the historian's description of Khayr al-Dīn's reaction to the death of his brother 'Arūdj in Tlemcen, as well as to the murder of one of his other brothers, makes clear the corsair's duplicity and unpredictability:

aunque le pesó mucho, se holgó mucho más por ser Rey y Señor, y así mostró lo uno y lo otro, porque hizo matar parte de los españoles que estaban cautivos en Argel, para mostrar a los de la ciudad que tomaba venganza en aquéllos de la muerte de sus hermanos, y para darles a entender que les tenía amor.

[although [his brother's death] gave him much grief, he enjoyed much more being king and lord, and so showed both sentiments, because he ordered the death of part of the Spanish who were captive in Algiers, in order to show the citizens that he was taking revenge on the captives for the death of his brothers, and to make them understand that he loved his brothers](67).

By framing deeds (which a historian could interpret from afar) with a subjective reaction, and combining the rational with the irrational, Gómara makes the character of Khayr al-Dīn more accessible and profound to his reader even as he creates an affective connection. At the same time, this “internalized” view of the corsair's character reveals key aspects of his personality and supposes the reasons behind many of his predatory deeds.

With great detail, Gómara chronicles Khayr al-Dīn's fall from power in Algiers in 1520, and his eventual return to the governorship of the Turkish-Algerian Regency, peaking with the expulsion of the Spaniards from the Peñón of Algiers in 1529. The cleric seems to take delight in Barbarossa's many contradictions and ambiguities, even as he celebrates his long-awaited rise to the rank of Grand Admiral. Gómara narrates how, in 1533, Khayr al-Dīn arrives in Constantinople “con grandísima pompa” [with extreme pomp] (93) at the court of the Great Turk, where Suleiman makes the corsair *Kapudan pasha* of the Ottoman Navy. The Sultan gives Barbarossa a powerful naval force in order to “hacer daño en tierra de cristianos, en especial del emperador Don Carlos” [pillage Christian lands, especially those belonging to Emperor Charles V] (94). By the early 1530s, then, Barbarossa had become one of the richest, most feared

and powerful men in the Mediterranean. Gómara recalls for the reader that, in the Spanish view, Barbarossa is nevertheless a criminal: “cosa fue de mucha compasión y de grandísimo mal las muchas quemas, muertes, robos y destrozos que Barbarroja hizo [...] aunque queramos decir cuántos y cuan grandes daños se hicieron aquella jornada, no lo sufre la lástima” [It was a heartbreaking, terrible thing, all these burnings, deaths, robberies and destruction that Barbarossa did (...) although we would like to say how many and how great were the damages done on that journey, the pain would be insufferable] (96). While qualifying the corsair’s illustrious title by acknowledging the severity of his crimes, Gómara cannot help but describe Khayr al-Dīn as having “la mayor armada que tenía Príncipe ni Rey, y era señor de todo el mar. Señoreaba [...] siete reinos [...] todos ganados por su lanza e industria” [the greatest fleet of any Prince or King, and he was lord of all the sea. He ruled (...) seven kingdoms (...) all won by his lance and hard work] (97). Barbarossa’s disturbing success, founded on crime, serves to question the law-bound Spanish model of military and political strategy in the conflicts with the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean. In his depiction of the corsair and attending commentaries, Gómara implies that new methods might be necessary for Spain to defeat such a rival.

Although it is patent that Gómara praises and admires the Barbarossa brothers, he is still most interested in revitalizing the Spanish political system to meet the challenges that Barbarossa, backed by the Great Turk, posed to Spanish sovereignty in the Mediterranean. This is suggested by the way that Gómara’s commentaries tend to trivialize the political system in North Africa both before and after the intervention of the Ottomans, as a kind of survival of the fittest, or a matter of luck, in contrast to the divinely ordained majesty of absolute monarchy, the Holy Roman Emperor. The historian notes the instability of Khayr al-Dīn’s political identity after he regains his position as “king” of Algiers:

Tan grande es la inconstancia de aquellos turcos y moros alárabes, y tan mudable la fortuna, que después que el conde Pedro Navarro ganó a Argel [en 1511] hasta que Jaradín Barbarroja la ganó esta vez [1529], que fue harto breve tiempo, hubo en aquel reino cinco reyes y seis con el de España, contando a Jaradín por dos, porque fue dos veces rey.

[So great is the inconstancy of those Turks and Arabs or Berbers, and so changeable is fortune, that from the time Count Pedro Navarro won Algiers (in 1511) until *Khayr al-Dīn* Barbarossa won it this time (1529), which was a very short span of time, there were in that kingdom five kings, six if you count Spain's king, and counting *Khayr al-Dīn* twice, since he was king two times] (77).

For Gómara, political rule in the Turkish-Algerian Regency was evidently not equivalent to the Spanish system of monarchy. Even though Barbarossa rose from humble origins to be a governor of a province, called “king” by the Europeans, this term was understood to be something distinct, and, albeit attractive, ultimately inferior to the divine right of Charles V. It is helpful to note that Antonio de Sosa, in Chapter 41 of his *Topographia*, clarifies his use of the European term “king” to translate *pasha* or *bey* (as Gómara does), stating that these political positions more closely corresponded to that of a “governor.” In other places not subject to the Ottoman Sultan, such as Tunis, the word “sultan” was still used, and meant “supreme lord or king.” It remains unclear whether Gómara uses the term “king” for ease of his audience's understanding, as Sosa does, or as a sign of the respect accorded the *pasha* and the power he wielded. Indeed, although Barbarossa was subject to the Sultan, their relationship was, as a Spanish historian has suggested, “sumamente ligera y sutil, casi simbólica y, sobre todo, maquiavélicamente voluntaria” [supremely tenuous, almost symbolic and, above all, voluntary in a Machiavellian sense] (Sola 1988: 140). So even though Gómara is sure to note that, as a “king,” Barbarossa could never equal the Emperor, the historian's admiration for the corsair's accomplishments is also undeniable.

*“El Emperador...anda muy cargado y fatigado”: Gómara’s Political Virtuality*

While Gómara refrains from overt didacticism in his characterization of the Barbarossa brothers, the political thread of the *Crónica* amounts to a series of acerbic critiques of Charles V’s approach to solving the crisis with the corsairs. The cleric repeatedly points out that the Emperor’s faulty intelligence and strategy cost him many battles and effectively gave the Barbarossa brothers the opportunity to grow in wealth. Charles V was extremely concerned with the way histories reflected his deeds in the Mediterranean, as a Christian prince battling the infidel, and even negotiated with Paolo Giovio to change his compromising depiction of the Battle of La Goleta before the publication of his *History of our Times* in 1551 (Kagan 86). Paradoxically, Gómara went beyond critique, or even beyond a negative portrayal of the Emperor, in considering his own writing as a political solution; this certainly would have been considered subversive, if the *Crónica* had made it to publication. Such rancor and opposition to Charles V was not uncommon among Castilians, however, and Gómara hailed from a humble family of the province of Soria, part of Old Castile, in Spain. Throughout his life, Gómara remained conservative and “Castilian” in temperament: marked with traces of the mentality of the Reconquest, and preoccupied by the local concerns of that kingdom (Jiménez 2000: 30). As the only male child of his family, Gómara inherited the position of priest in the family chaplainship that his uncle had founded under the Bishopric of Osma, a chaplainship that ensured Gómara’s lifelong connection to this region of Spain, even as he lived abroad for several years. The nation, as Covarrubias defined it, was only a kingdom or province; thus, the term *patria chica* (small country) described the local, more tangible loyalties of the Spaniard during the sixteenth century, even as a broad geographical consciousness was emerging.



Although Gómara's residence in Italy, in particular at the home of the open minded Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, would temper his views on Imperial policy and bring him closer to the cause of his Emperor, he still retained fierce loyalties to Soria and its political agenda. As Lafaye emphasizes, Gómara's youth and adolescence in Castile in the 1520s was a very violent time during which the Revolt of the *Comuneros*, or Castilian War of the Communities, took place. This war stemmed from a conservative movement against the "rey extranjero" [foreigner king], the Flemish Charles I, whose imperial policies were perceived as damaging to the already economically depressed Castile. The *Comuneros* launched a full-out insurrection against Habsburg rule, forming their own army, burning towns, and driving out members of the government. Charles crushed the rebellion, even publicly executing six prominent men from Soria. Lafaye asserts that "la sangre de los comuneros de Castilla jamás se secaría en las manos del rey flamenco; el joven soriano [Gómara] nunca lo olvidaría" [the blood of the Comuneros of Castile would never dry on the hands of the Flemish king; the young Sorian (Gómara) would never forget it] (76).

Perhaps Gómara's shaky allegiance to the "rey extranjero," Charles V, permitted him to view the sovereign with heightened relativity and granted him the liberty to admire the Ottomans. The change of the dynamics of power in the Mediterranean was attributable, after all, to the alliance between the Great Turk and Barbarossa, and the creation of the Turkish-Algerian Regency. The *Kapudan pasha* was a skilled corsair, but by fighting the Spaniards under the name of the Ottoman Empire, his power and resources increased exponentially. As such, Gómara draws yet another daring parallel, this time between Charles V and Suleiman the Magnificent, crowned and sworn in on the same day (31), a comparison that seems to be to Charles' distinct disadvantage:

Estos dos emperadores, Carlos y Solimán, poseen tanto como poseyeron los romanos [...] y entre estos dos está partida la monarquía: cada cual de ellos

trabaja por quedar monarca y señor del mundo; mas vemos que por nuestros pecados sucede mejor a Solimán sus deseos y sus engaños que no a don Carlos [...] los turcos ejercitan mejor su intento que no españoles: guardan mejor la orden y disciplina de la guerra, tiene mejor consejo, emplean mejor su dinero, de manera que Solimán, juntando el consejo con sus fuerzas y acompañando las fuerzas con su ánimo, ha ganado por fuerza a cristianos a Belgrado

[These two emperors, Charles and Suleiman, possess as much as the Romans did (...) and between these two the monarchy is split: each one strives to become monarch and lord of the world; but we see that because of our flaws, Suleiman achieves his desires and designs better than Don Carlos does (...) the Turks achieve their objectives better than the Spaniards: they keep better military order and discipline, they have better advisors, they spend their money more wisely, in such a fashion that Suleiman, combining council with his forces, and bolstering his forces with his spirit, he has won Belgrade by force from the Christians](31).

Although Gómara portrays the Ottoman Empire as formidable, and here, superior, we must recall that the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires were disparate. As a monarch, Charles V had to deal with an inherited, widespread Empire with a diffuse legislative structure, whereas Suleiman's territories were territorially compact and unified by his subjects' total allegiance to the figure of the Sultan (Bunes Ibarra 1999: 19). Although Gómara almost praises Charles for having been able to resist the Turkish advance towards Vienna in 1529, "la llave de Alemania y la defensa de la Cristiandad" [the key to Germany and the defense of Christianity], he ultimately depicts Charles V as weak and no match for Suleiman. Attributing the Great Turk's defeat to his lack of "ánimo" rather than to Charles' military prowess, Gómara heaps encomium on the Sultan: "está hoy día Solimán el mayor señor que en su límite ha habido, el mayor príncipe del mundo, más temido de cuantos reyes cristianos han sido; y si digo que cristianos son causa de este miedo, diré verdad" [these days Suleiman is the greatest Lord that has been in his orb, the greatest Prince of the world, more feared than so many Christian kings have been; and if I say that Christians are the cause of this fear, I will be telling the truth] (32). Such hyperbolic praise echoes Gómara's characterization of Khayr al-Dīn, as "el mejor corsario [...] que jamás ha habido" (120). The proximity of the Great

Turk to Europe—his taking of Belgrade in 1521 and surrounding of Vienna the same year as the Spaniards lost their stronghold in the Peñón of Algiers—was truly a terrifying prospect.<sup>52</sup> “¡Guay de nosotros si la toman!” Gómara exclaims, emphasizing that if Vienna were to be taken, the Turks would already have made their way to France (32).

It is hard to imagine that, with passages such as these, the *Crónica* would have been well received at the Spanish court had it made it to publication, or that it could have been considered “official history.” Gómara’s use of comparison demonstrates his conception of power of the sovereign to be contingent, rather than absolute, opening the door for the “self-made man” to create his own realm of rule. As it turns out, these critiques intrude throughout the entire *Crónica*, indicating the text’s political purpose. Following the exaltation of Suleiman, Gómara describes how in 1543, the King of France, Francis I, brought Khayr al-Dīn Barbarossa and the Turk’s armada (of which he was Admiral) to Toulon to wage war against Charles V—achieving an alliance that the Emperor had sought without success.<sup>53</sup> Deviating from diachronic life writing to the narration of contemporary events, Gómara claims:

quejámonos y de veras nos dolemos, y lloramos los males y daños y la grandísima pérdida que de esto ha venido a toda Cristiandad porque no hay provincia casi en toda Europa de cristianos que no haya recibido golpe o herida de turcos, y estamos en condiciones que si no nos apercibimos mucho y no nos adargamos, según está bien armado nuestro enemigo, y según nos da prisa, corremos peligro de ser vencidos.

[Let’s complain and in truth, we are suffering and crying over the evils and damages and the great loss that from this has come to all Christianity because there almost isn’t a province in all of Christian Europe that hasn’t been

<sup>52</sup> At the Battle of Lepanto, in 1571, the Holy League finally dealt a definitive blow to the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>53</sup> Documents pertaining to secret negotiations between the Genovese Admiral Andrea Doria, working for the Spaniards, and Barbarossa are available in the appendix of the 1853 and 1989 editions of the *Crónica*. From the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*: “The existence of secret negotiations between Doria and Barbarossa, shown in numerous published documents (see Manfroni, 332 f.; C. Capasso, *Barbarossa e Carlo V*, in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, lxix (1932), 169-209, 304-48) explains why the two admirals never provoked each other and why they both adopted an extremely prudent attitude towards each other.”

attacked or wounded by Turks, and we are in a situation that, if we don't pay attention and protect ourselves, according to the way our enemy is so well armed and according to the urgency this should give us, we run the risk of being conquered] (33).

In this way, Gómara reminds his readers, through direct and eloquent prose, how the threat of Barbarossa merited immediate and extreme response on the part of Charles V. The *Crónica* insists that Spain's past errors can lead to future success: for example, the author points to the misguided decisions of the Catholic Monarchs, who inadvertently permitted Barbarossa to dominate the Mediterranean and endanger the Peninsula. Indeed, if the corsair was "animoso y valiente," it was also true that the coast of Catalonia was unprotected after Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand ordered all the galleys destroyed on moral grounds. They had been persuaded by some priests to do so: "les cargaron las conciencias porque tenían galeras [...] que Dios no tenía más que un infierno para todo el mundo, y que ellos querían tener muchos, pues cada galera era un infierno" [their consciences bothered them because they had galley ships [...] as God only had one Hell for all the world, and (the Kings) wanted to have many, since each galley ship was its own Hell] (42). Gómara perhaps ironically attributes the destruction of the galleys to the Catholic Monarchs' "bondad y clemencia" [kindness and clemency] and to the "amor del prójimo" [love of one's neighbor]. Christian virtues, however, might come at too severe a price in the Mediterranean battle zone. To emphasize how these errors must be learned from, Gómara echoes the pathos of his preface: "mas lloro tantos males y daños como por este consejo han venido a España y a los otros reinos que están debajo de su corona" [but I lament the many evils and the harm that have come to Spain and the other kingdoms under her crown, as a result of this piece of advice] (43).

The historian immediately follows this with an exposition on the nature of political advice, which we may take to be self-reflexive:

Los consejos que se dan a la república, a los reyes, príncipes y grandes señores, dos fines, dos respetos han de tener: uno a lo presente, otro a lo

porvenir, que de tal manera hemos de proveer y remediar a las necesidades y peligros que se ofrecen que prevengamos no se siga mayores inconvenientes del remedio que ponemos.

[The advice one gives to the republic, to the kings, princes, and nobility, must have two ends, two characteristics: one looking to the present, and the other to what's to come, in such a way that we must provide for and take care of pressing issues and dangers that come, while ensuring the solution we provide does not create greater problems for us] (43).

This statement reinforces the idea that the *Crónica* primarily serves as counsel to Charles V. Yet as we know, Gómara's brand of historiography went beyond advice, attempting to "stand in for the sovereign." The author's historical ideal would be the creation of a strong Spain, but he seems to doubt the capacity of Charles V's leadership, as well as his ability to learn from his predecessors' errors: in one instance, the *Crónica* details the lack of foresight of the Emperor's naval policy, which had disposed of many Biscayan ships and lost well-trained mariners, thus leaving Spain's northern coasts vulnerable.

Though Gómara is loath to assign clear-cut blame to either Charles V or even to Barbarossa for the tragedies that befall the Spaniards in the Mediterranean, there is a clear divide between active and passive policies: Charles V permits the commitment of atrocities through absence or incompetence, whereas Barbarossa orders torture, execution, and captivity in accordance with the level of revenge and punishment he seeks to inflict upon the Christians. For example, Gómara claims that Charles V's negligence caused the Spaniards to lose the Peñón of Algiers in 1529. Distracted by his impending coronation as Holy Roman Emperor, he ignored their requests for aid: "los olvidó con otros muchos y grandes negocios que entonces trataba" [he forgot them, what with the many other important matters of business that he was then attending to] (80). The historian portrays Spain's sufferings as if deriving from Charles' ill decisions, which left the Peninsula wide open to Barbarossa's attacks.

The contrast between the Emperor's and Barbarossa's political practices brings

to light the *Crónica*'s suggestion that, while the corsair is cruel, he protects the people under his rule, an assertion that intimates that Charles V, as a Christian prince, is moral but leaves the Spaniards vulnerable. Barbarossa, equal parts king and corsair, nobleman and butcher, is nonetheless able to lead the Ottoman Empire's encroachment upon Europe, threatening the safety of Spain and its Italian territories.

In the end, however, neither of these leaders seems to be suitable to Gómara. In fact, the historian seems to indicate that the true force for Spanish revitalization and protection are the Spaniards themselves. In his description of the Battle for La Goleta in 1535, he at first praises Charles V's knights, soldiers, and naval fleet, but this soon gives way to his description of the Emperor's faulty strategy that left La Goleta wide open to vicious attack: Barbarossa burned the Spanish alive (99). It was the inherent strength of the Spaniards, "nuestros españoles," which saved La Goleta from the Emperor's errors. Even as Charles V continues to disappoint him, Gómara affirms the capability of his fellow citizens to muster the strength for self-defense. As such, his vernacular history of the dangerous Mediterranean directly appeals to the emergent sense of Spanish proto-national identity. The historian writes to excite the Spaniards' will-to-action: if he could convince the nobility and other policy-makers of the gravity of the corsair threat and the inefficacy of current political practices, Spain would have a chance at defeating Barbarossa and the Ottoman Empire.

*"Sin rey/ sin ley ninguna": Concluding Thoughts*

In 1545, while Gómara wrote the lives of the Barbarossa corsairs, Khayr al-Dīn continued to lead the Ottoman Fleet against the Spanish Empire. As I have shown in this chapter, Gómara uses techniques of humanistic historiography, along with political critiques, in his *Crónica*, in order to alert Spain to the threat it was facing.

Gómara's insistence on exposing both the virtues and vices of the corsairs, as well as those of Charles V, placed this historian in a precarious position with regards to his apparent allegiance to his *patria*. On the one hand, the kingdoms of Spain could be united by his description of their common enemy, and the Empire needed to understand Barbarossa in order to plan future naval policy. On the other hand, Gómara's admiration of the enemy and critique of Charles V could seem subversive to Spanish interests, and indeed, to that very sense of proto-national identity which the historian sought to protect.

To sum up, I propose that the ideas of Pedro Rhua, Gómara's teacher from Soria, on the role of the historian may help us to characterize the cleric's approach to the *Crónica*. Rhua's reflections are recorded in a series of letters he wrote in 1540 to Charles V's *cronista real*, Antonio de Guevara, where he paraphrases the treatise of Lucian (second century CE) on the writing of history:

Esto con mas verdad se dira del historiador / porque ha de tener estas dos cosas. La vna que sea bueno: y la otra sabio en bien hablar y escreuir lo que tomare a cargo: y lo que es primero en la diffinicion: es tambien lo primero y principal que se requiere en la historia / que sea hombre bueno / que ame verdad / y la diga libremente / sin amor / temor / odio / auaricia / ambicion / misericordia / verguença: *en fin ha de ser huesped sin patria / sin rey / sin ley ninguna: diligente en saber examinar la verdad: semejante a un espejo claro: que quales formas / y objectos rescibe: tales los represente.*

[This with the greatest truth will be said of the historian/ because he has to be these two things: one, he must be good, and the other, he must be well versed in speaking, and in writing what he takes as his charge: and that which is first in this definition is also first and foremost of what is required of History/ that he be a good man/ that he love the truth/ and that he tell it freely/ without love/ fear/ hate/ avarice/ ambition/ compassion/ shame: *in sum he must be a guest without a country/ without a king/ without any law: diligent in finding out the truth: like a smooth mirror, which reflects forms and objects as they are.*](Rhua 1549, fols. 44v y ss., cited in Kohut 2009: 158, my emphasis).

Gómara's own concluding words to the *Crónica*—"Esto es, muy ilustre señor, lo que en suma han hecho los Barbarrojas" [In sum, my Illustrious Lord, this is what the Barbarossa brothers have done] (120)—rejoin his address to the Marquis of Astorga in his preface, reminding the reader of the historian's attempt to write

*llanamente*, or as Rhua suggests, like a “smooth mirror.” By representing the “corsair-kings” in an extended biography, and not in a compact portrait or disjointed compendium, Gómara created a fascinating, verisimilar reflection of the current events of his time. He vividly presented his renegade characters as powerful, intriguing, full of courage and spirit, cruel, vicious, and ultimately, politically viable against Europe’s most powerful sovereign, Charles V. Although Gómara gambled the reception of his work, as well as his aspirations to be a *cronista real*, by exposing the flaws of the Spanish Empire, he hoped that his *Crónica* would indeed provide a “materialization” of Spain’s most pressing concern in the Mediterranean and point the way to its resolution. His *Crónica* sought to represent Charles V insofar as the sovereign was unable, or unwilling, to face the threats against his Empire. As such, we may say that Gómara wrote as though he were, in Rhua’s words, “un huesped sin patria, sin rey, sin ley ninguna,” given the urgency of the message he attempted to purvey. For Gómara, perhaps, the historian’s sovereign was truth. He pursued it relentlessly in the service of Empire, and in the name of Spain, a nation he felt he was helping to create with his historical narrative. From its preface to its conclusion, the *Crónica* exemplifies the idea that greatness does not arise from adherence to prescribed behaviors and laws, but from a willingness to transgress and innovate, just as the Barbarossa brothers had done.



## CHAPTER 2

### *El corsario gentil y el Marqués del Valle: Hernán Cortés's Parallel Lives*

*Para Gómara, en una palabra, la historia es esencialmente la biografía de los grandes hombres. [For Gomara, in a word, history is essentially the biography of great men]*

—Ramón Iglesia, *Cronistas e historiadores de la conquista de México* 100

*What could there be more monstrous and more savage than man unrestrained by law and the fear of judgment? Could any beast cause such carnage?*

—Juan de Mariana, *De Rege* 22

*For who does not know history's first law to be that the author must not dare to tell anything but the truth? And its second that he must make bold to tell the whole truth?*

—Cicero, *De Oratore*

*Writing Hernán<sup>54</sup> Cortés's Life: "If the laws had to be broken in order to reign, then broken they must be"*

As we saw in the previous chapter, the lives of Francisco López de Gómara, Khayr al-Dīn Barbarossa, Hernán Cortés, and Emperor Charles V intersected at the Battle for Algiers in 1541, the loss of which Gómara attributed in part to the Emperor disregarding the willingness of Cortés to lead a battle on land. After returning to Valladolid, where both the Emperor and Cortés were residing at the time, Gómara began his project to write the lives of both the Barbarossa brothers and Cortés, which he understood to be a species of “parallel lives.” But while the Barbarossa brothers were an external threat to the Spanish Empire (and external to Spanish law), and thus offered Gómara a platform of critique of Charles V's government, Cortés provided Gómara with a more intimate forum to reflect on the status and potential of Spanish identity and sovereignty during its initial phase of imperial expansion. At the same time, however, Cortés was also an outlaw, beginning with his breaking away from the governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar (1465-1524) in 1518, after which

---

<sup>54</sup> Hernán, Hernando, and Fernando are all acceptable spellings. Fernando is the name by which Gómara refers to Cortés.

Cortés brutally took power in Aztec Tenochtitlán, fascinating his contemporaries. This was only the beginning of his triumphs, as well as his legal tangles with Charles V's administration. Even if Cortés did fight at the side of Charles V in 1541 at Algiers, he nonetheless spent much of his time upon his return to Spain in 1528<sup>55</sup>, and again in the 1540s, being prosecuted in the courts. The most common accusations against him were:

relaciones carnales con mujeres que eran parientes entre sí, tiranía, enriquecimiento, no obediencia a las provisiones reales; que quería levantarse con la tierra, que se hacía casas con torres, que tenía mucha artillería, que jugaba y consentía blasfemias y que era sospechoso de la muerte de su primera mujer.

[sexual relations with women who were related to each other, tyranny, enriching himself, disobedience to royal decrees, that he wanted to commit treason and usurp territory of the King, that he made houses with towers, that he had a lot of artillery, that he gambled and consented to blasphemies, and that he was a suspect in the death of his first wife] (Martínez 1990: 548).

This varied list, which ranges from murder to what we might term castle-envy, shows the complexity of Cortés's persona as both a would-be sovereign and a nobleman, who was also a criminal continually pursued by the law. As J.H. Elliott relates, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that Cortés could even quote the classics<sup>56</sup> on how to break the law as *adelantado* of New Spain: "When a *residencia* [judicial review of an official's acts at the end of his term] was held against him in 1529 a witness alleged that he frequently heard him say that 'if the laws had to be broken in order to reign, then broken they must be'" (1967: 46). Through his rhetorical and improvisational abilities, and actions that were "exceptionally hazardous but carefully calculated," Cortés both recognized and evaded the law in order to accomplish things that Charles V could only dream of (Elliott 1971: xii).

---

<sup>55</sup> Cortés returned to Mexico in 1530 with limited military powers and large land holdings, but the controversies and conflicts with the Spanish Crown continued. He sailed to Spain in 1541, where he died in 1547.

<sup>56</sup> "The original quotation reads: 'Si violandum est ius, regnandi gratia violandum est' (C. Suetoni Tranquilli, *Divus Iulius*, ed. H. E. Butler and M. Cary, Oxford, 1962, p. 14; cited by Elliott, 1967: 47, note 1).

In the mid-1540s, when Gómara began writing his biography of Cortés, *Historia de la conquista de México* [History of the Conquest of Mexico<sup>57</sup>], the conquistador continued battling the courts and pleading with Charles V to preserve his estate. It was from this troubled position that Gómara had to craft his hero's life. In this chapter I explore how Gómara, in order to portray Cortés's complexity, adapts and expands Spanish historiography and life writing to match the challenges of his subject. The *Conquest of Mexico* presents Cortés as prototype of the new *hombre ilustre* [illustrious man], who, unforgettable and singular, personifies the characteristics needed to govern and expand Spanish imperial sovereignty throughout the world. Sometimes called "claros varones," as I discussed in the Introduction, these members of the Spanish "pantheon" of great men were also a synecdoche for the developing narrative of Spain as a State and Empire. For Gómara, however, Cortés's life not only *resisted* official narratives of sovereignty, it also *exceeded* them. The *Conquest of Mexico*, although by its title is ostensibly a history of the conquest, is actually framed by the life history [*vida*] of Cortés. Juan Miralles Ostos affirms, "título más conveniente habría sido *Hechos o vida de Hernán Cortés*" [a more appropriate title would have been *Deeds or Life of Hernán Cortés*] (xxvi).<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the *Conquest of Mexico* begins with the conqueror's birth and ends with his death, with many intercalated biographical details and featuring Cortés as the primary protagonist and

---

<sup>57</sup> The currently available English translation which I have consulted and based some of my translations on is Lesley Byrd Simpson's somewhat abridged *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary* (1966). Like Simpson, at times I have also had to clarify the subject and objects of sentences, as Gómara somewhat takes advantage of the omission of subjects in Castilian Spanish. I will refer to this work by the shortened name *Conquest of Mexico* from this point on.

<sup>58</sup> Another biographical fragment in Latin has conventionally been attributed to Gómara, known in Castilian as the *Vida de Hernán Cortés*. First published by Joaquín García Itzcalbalteta in 1858, it is a translation from the Latin manuscript fragment, *De Rebus Gestis Ferdinandi Cortesii*; its authorship, however, is still disputed. The most recent study and translation, published in 2007 by Elena Pellús Pérez, *Sobre las hazañas de Hernán Cortés*, maintains that the author should be considered anonymous, rather than ascribing it to Gómara. For this reason, and because it is essentially the same in content as Gómara's *Historia de la conquista de México* (with some variations in style, and the fact that it was written in Latin), I will focus on the biographical aspects of the *Historia* as its authorship is well-established.

hero, obscuring other captains and soldiers who participated in the conquest. Yet because historical writing during the sixteenth century was of a fundamentally legal character, as González Echevarría has established, Cortés standing as an outlaw posed significant challenges for Gómara in representing his hero as a *claro varón*. In the *Conquest of Mexico*, as in the *Crónica*, Gómara continues to develop the political significance of his historical discourse, and takes the approach of embracing Cortés's ambiguous legal status. The historian portrays Cortés's rise to a unique and new kind of sovereign power, as well as his fall from it, in constant tension with Charles V and other royal officials. Alongside his novel subject, then, Gómara again creatively employs techniques of Renaissance Humanist historiography, more developed from those he uses in the *Crónica*, to represent Cortés's character and his deeds: illusionism, and especially the use of overwhelming detail, both euphoric and horrific; the opposition of sovereign and outlaw; the creation of interiority and ambiguity of character through pathos and voice; and the exposure of, and insistence in, revealing duplicity, paradox, and contradiction, without always resolving these, as Cortés achieves his heroic deeds in the name of Empire (Carman 145).

*"Busco nuevo estilo y manera de escribir": Innovative narratives for the new hombre ilustre*

Cortés's life defied the categories and methods previously used to characterize "official" lives in sixteenth-century Spain, and historians struggled to render his life in print in such a way that captured his grandeur. But the conquistador of Mexico had always been newsworthy. Historiographical reports about Cortés had been nearly simultaneous with the initial publication of his famous letters to Charles V in the

1520s<sup>59</sup>, beginning with Peter Martyr of Angleria's *Decades of the New World* (1494-1525).<sup>60</sup> Cortés's extreme personal contradictions and his instrumental role in Spanish imperial expansion did not make him a subject that normative history and life writing was prepared to handle. How could a sixteenth-century Spanish historian portray such a criminal as a hero, given the historiographical forms then in circulation? Portrait books of *virii illustri* didn't typically include outlaws among their ranks. Gómara had to change this if he was to recognize and write 'around' Cortés's complexity.

This need for innovation was recognized long before Gómara took up his pen. The first official biography of Hernán Cortés was published in 1530 by a Sicilian humanist living in Spain, Charles V's *cronista real* Lucio Marineo Sículo (c.1444-1536). It formed part of a section on "los claros varones de España" in his larger work, *De rebus Hispaniae memoralibus* [*On the Memorable Things of Spain*]. Despite the fact that his publication came after the 1527 royal prohibition of Cortés's letters, Marineo Sículo's admiration for the conquistador remained unabashed; he went so far as to say that Cortés "no sólo mereció título de Marqués, más aún también título y corona de rey" [deserved not only the title of Marquis, but also the title and crown of king]. As might be expected, this daring portrait of Cortés was prohibited in the second edition of Marineo Sículo's work (1533) and was ordered to be torn out of all first editions. The proximity of sovereign and outlaw in his observations about the

---

<sup>59</sup> The second and third *relaciones*, in the form of letters, from Cortés to Charles V enjoyed wide circulation throughout Europe and were translated into many languages. These were published in 1522. The fourth letter was published in 1525 and 1526, but was not as widely diffused. The "first letter" was not written by Cortés, but by a deputy at Veracruz, and was not discovered until 1844 (it was considered lost). The fifth letter was also discovered at this time, although it was written in 1526. The Crown prohibited publication of the letters after 1527, due to Cortés's upcoming *residencia* (judicial review of his acts as an official) with respect to his conduct in New Spain.

<sup>60</sup> Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (1457-1526) was the author of the first accounts of European explorations in the Americas. These letters and reports, written in Latin, were grouped together into sets of ten chapters called "Decades." There were eight in total, and these were published separately, then together beginning in 1530 (Alcalá).

legally beleaguered conquistador were too close for comfort for royal authorities.

Marineo Sículo, however, did not consider his biography definitive. On the contrary, in Cortés he found inspiration for the further development of Spanish historiography: “deseando mucho escrebir las cosas nuevas y admirables que don Fernando Cortés en nuestros tiempos ha hecho, dignas todas de gran loor y que queden en perpetua memoria de los hombres, busco nuevo estilo y manera de escribir y nueva orden de loor” [I look for a new style and manner of writing, a new way of praising, as I wish very much to write the new and admirable deeds Don Fernando Cortés has done in our time]. The royal historian claimed to have been unable to achieve this, since Cortés “ha excedido a los caballeros ilustres y grandes capitanes como las cosas que con gran ánimo y sanctidad ha hecho, allí también espanta y hace temer, no solamente mi ingenio, pero también lo de todos los otros escritores por grandes y altos que sean” [has exceeded other illustrious gentlemen and great captains by virtue of the things he has done with great energy and sanctity, thus intimidating not only my talent, but that of all other writers no matter how great or respected]. This first biography, then, set forth a challenge to all those historians and life writers that came after Marineo Sículo: if you can successfully write the life of Cortés, who has exceeded all previously known bounds of illustriousness, you shall be the epitome of the new historian, whose pioneering style and “*ingenio*” overshadows even the most prolific of *cronistas reales*.

It seems that with his biography of Cortés, Gómara took Marineo Sículo up on his challenge—and met it. Gómara’s two-volume work on the New World, *Historia general de las Indias y Conquista de México* [History of the Indies and Conquest of Mexico], known together as *Hispania Victrix*, was a bestseller throughout all of Europe after its initial publication in 1552 at Zaragoza, despite its almost immediate prohibition in 1553 by Prince Philip, the future Philip II. This prohibition didn’t seem to have as much actual force as the crown would have liked, as six clandestine editions

appeared in Castile in 1553, and one in Aragón in 1554, as well as translations into Italian in 1556, 1557, 1560 and 1564 (Gurría Lacroix xiii). Gómara's work, then, was the first comprehensive history of the Spanish conquest in wide circulation, and his sophisticated and readable style stands out among his contemporaries.

Nevertheless, as González Echevarría notes, Renaissance historians, even when faced with new phenomena, still had to write “within a grid of strict rules and formulae” based on legal writing (44). How could Gómara reconcile the regulation of writing not only by conventions but also by the Spanish State, with an extended portrait glorifying one of its outlaws? Gómara himself gives us some clues to understand his ambitious manner of confronting Cortés's novelty as an agent of Empire. The historian certainly recognized and praised the rift opened up by the European discovery of the New World. As he wrote in his prologue to the *Historia de las Indias*, dedicated to Charles V, the discovery was the greatest event since the coming of Christ: “La mayor cosa después de la creación del mundo, sacando la incarnación y muerte del que lo crió, es el descubrimiento de Indias; y así las llaman Nuevo Mundo” (7). The uniqueness of what, for the Europeans, truly was a “New World” posed special problems for Humanistic historians, who relied on canonical and classical forms to produce “truthful” and authoritative narratives. Kathleen Myers, in her study of Fernández Oviedo's writings on the New World, emphasizes how the vast amounts of new information and experiences forced historians “to devise a method to reconcile the Old World system with new empirical information” (28). The Americas—and the lives of its conquistadors—had no exact precedent, even in classical or Church history. As Jonathan Loesberg asserts with regards to Gómara's American historiography, “Recording new worlds can mean generating new historical forms as well, opening or reopening the [...] vital debate of what counts as history” (239). Although Gómara's *Conquest of Mexico* places itself within a lineage of

traditional historical forms and conventions, the subject of Cortés's conquests and his life would force the historian to confront his methods and material creatively.

On the level of form, Gómara takes the curious approach of conflating a "history" of the conquest with the biography of Cortés. It seems in *Conquest of Mexico* that Gómara resolves his own debate between history and life as articulated in the preface of his *Crónica*. Cortés's life was especially important to write *as* a history because of its parallel with the developing nation and empire of Spain. As J.H. Elliott explains in regard to Cortés's life, "Between 1485, the year of his birth, and 1547, the year of his death, Spain passed through a whole cycle of experiences which are strangely reflected in Cortés's personal career" (1967: 42). For Spain this was a "period in which a reorganized and rearticulated medieval society, increasingly exposed to external intellectual influences, turns outwards to acquire an overseas empire, and finds itself endowed with a unique imperial and religious mission" (43). A unique mission called for a unique agent of empire: in Gómara's view, Cortés had taken Spain to new heights, and should serve as a model to future sovereigns and nobility alike. Yet the difficulties of writing and celebrating the life of a man who was explicitly understood as a threat to Spanish sovereignty, while instrumental to its expansion (a "highly equivocal position," as Elliott calls it), were considerable (1971: xii).

As such, it is not only that Gómara conflates "conquest with the historiography of conquest," as Carman shows in the case of Cortés's speeches, but also that Gómara conflates Cortés's life with both of these, and uses the historiography of conquest as a platform for the critique of the Spanish concept of the hero and of the practices of both national and imperial sovereignty (168). "The task that Gómara set for himself," writes his translator Lesley B. Simpson, "was to give form to the history of Mexico and make it one with the life of Cortés" (xxi). The "most demanding" form of history,



then, for Gómara, “was, fittingly, the biography or *vida*” (Carman 112). In the *Conquest of Mexico*, moreover, “biography and conquest revolve around each other and define each other” (87). As such, the historiographical form that could be used to narrate the Mexican conquest had very much to do with its tandem (and for Gómara, inseparable) subject, the life of Cortés.

The contradictions Gómara cultivates with respect to Cortés’s character and deeds speak to the controversies the conquistador’s actions generated, and to the instability of the narrative of Empire and of its celebrated agents in the mid-sixteenth century. Because the feats of Hernán Cortés directly challenged concepts of Spanish *imperium*, writing his life was nearly impossible without incurring royal wrath. But this was a risk that Gómara was willing to take, as this brand of honesty was central to his approach to life writing. He wished to expose the virtues and vices of his characters, in an objective manner, demonstrating his conception that great individuals were the substance of history. As Ramón Iglesia affirms, “Gómara fully embodies Renaissance ideology in that he has a conception of history that is individualist, aristocratic, and heroic” (103). He represents Cortés as a nuanced character who deserves admiration, despite his faults and the horrors of his actions, and who should be exalted in national memory as an example of a relative commoner rising to the status of ‘king’—or, officially, Marquis—by virtue of his daring and merits. This representation results, at the same time, in a severe political critique of Charles V and his bureaucratic administration of Empire, which could have accounted for Prince Philip’s censorship of Gómara’s excellent work.

Gómara’s personal investment in the centrality of the concept of the great man and his aspirations to be one himself (although on such paradoxical terms that he made this objective impossible to achieve in his lifetime, as we saw in the previous chapter) are made clear in his micro-autobiography inserted in his *Annals*. Speaking of himself

in the third person, the historian clearly shows the conception he had of his persona:

Nace Francisco López de Gómara domingo de mañana, que fué día de la Purificación de nuestra Señora que llaman Candelaria, el qual hiço estos años, y las guerras de mar de nuestros tiempos, y la historia de las indias con la conquista de México, y piensa otras obrillas, y pues lo ha trabajado es razon que lo goçe en compañía de tantos buenos varones.

[Francisco López de Gómara is born on a Sunday morning, the Day of the Purification of Our Lady they call Candelaria, he who wrote these Annals, and the Naval Wars of our Times, and the History of the Indies with the Conquest of Mexico, and is considering other shorter works, and because he has worked hard [in these works] it is reason for him to enjoy [the fruits of his labor] in the company of so many fine men] (1912: 182).

Gómara not only wished to be in the *company* of fine men, but as a historian of Cortés, he attempted to become great himself. In asserting “Francisco López de Gómara” as a historical personage in his year-by-year record of the events of note in sixteenth-century Spain, beginning with the birth of Charles V, Gómara suggests that historiography “[shapes] his contemporary world” (Roa-de-la-Carrera 26). As a self-published and public figure, then, the historian found “a means of participating in the political life of the state” since “history was the genre that had the most literary prestige and cultural impact” (27-28). It was a genre, too, that might convey the same prestige, or *fama*, to its author.<sup>61</sup>

Too often, Gómara’s *Conquest of Mexico* has been dismissed as the work of Cortés’s “secretary,” who simply copied the conquistador’s dictations. Indeed, even for Gómara’s contemporaries, the salience of its biographical frame led his and Cortés’s opponents, such as Bartolomé de las Casas, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, to label him an “apologist” for Cortés, or, as Díaz del Castillo suggested, a paid propagandist for Cortés and his family in their plight before the

---

<sup>61</sup> That Gómara would associate intellectual illustriousness with writing about Cortés is not as unusual as it might seem. Cortés was an astute and even learned man, particularly when it came to Spanish law, although Anthony Pagden asserts that many exaggerate the depth of his knowledge of the law. Still, as Miralles Ostos reveals, the 1540s Cortés’s house in Valladolid was the gathering place for an “academy” [circle] of intellectuals that doesn’t seem to have included Gómara, despite the fact that he was living in the city at the same time (xliv).

Crown for additional compensation for his services. Yet there is no clear proof of any of this. The only documented compensation Gómara received from the Cortés family consisted of a meager 500 maravedís offered by Martín Cortés in 1554, upon publication of a revised version of Gómara's *Hispania Victrix*. Thus, it is important to emphasize that Gómara's relationship to Hernán Cortés is in doubt and that to date no one has definitively proved if he was, in fact, Cortés secretary or cleric, as an offended Bartolomé de Las Casas wrote in his *Historia de las Indias*, vols. II and III—the only extant “proof” of such a relationship. The current consensus of Gómara scholars, such as Nora Edith Jiménez and Miralles Ostos, is that Gómara did *not* reside in Cortés's house and was not an “asalariado” [paid employee]. Rather, it seems that Gómara had some indirect connections to Cortés and his son, Martín, and probably was acquainted or even friendly with them, living for several years in the same city of Valladolid. There is no doubt that Gómara admired Cortés, that he approved of the conquest and thought it justified, and that, as a priest, he esteemed the evangelization and conversion of the Nahuatl peoples very highly. Yet any ideological difference we or others may have with Gómara, whose views certainly were controversial, should not lead us to undervalue his work for its historiographical innovations.

In labeling Gómara an “asalariado,” his opponents and critics were, ironically, able to dismiss his *Conquest of Mexico* as the equivalent of that of a *cronista real*, who was paid to aggrandize his sovereign and patron. Unlike the *cronista real*, however, Gómara probably did not have unlimited access to privileged papers to provide the details of his history. After all, the fact that Gómara was not mentioned in Cortés's lengthy and meticulously detailed will (which included employees as beneficiaries), suggests he did not work directly for the Marquis (Miralles Ostos xlv). And neither, it would seem, did he have a paid obligation to enlarge his hero's reputation; in many instances, in the *Conquest of Mexico*, he is very critical of Cortés,

which offended the deceased conquistador's family and led to some notable revisions in the 1554 edition.<sup>62</sup> As Miralles Ostos points out, Gómara's lack of access to new information was a major obstacle to the innovative writing of Cortés's biography and affected the historian's ability to develop the character and deeds of his protagonist in a new fashion. But somehow he did it. The biography of this new imperial actor was written not out of obligation, but out of affinity and inspiration; it constituted Gómara's attempt to match the forms and techniques of life writing to the magnitude of the deeds and life he wished to portray. In doing so, he demonstrated the value that he accorded the inner circles of power in Spain, while also revealing his conviction that the self-made man, the new Prince, of which Cortés was a prototype, was the kind of sovereign that Spain needed to increase and maintain her vast and threatened Empire.

*"La violación de la Ley": Gómara's Approach to the Conquest-as-Biography*

In taking up Lucio Marineo Sículo's challenge, Gómara's *Conquest of Mexico* employs a historiography that may be characterized as lifelike, creating, in the words of Glen Carman, a "convincing likeness": an illusionism that is incantatory, overwhelming the reader with detail, often abject and horrific, even as the historian extols Cortés's lawless and law-creating actions in the Americas. Gómara's frequent and skillful use of humor, irony, and the macabre are also well established as humanistic techniques he uses to take his brand of historiography to a new level (Loesberg; Carman; Simpson xxiv). Renaissance Humanist irony, especially, "defines by contrast, by juxtaposition of illusion and reality, intention and event; the repetitious

---

<sup>62</sup> These revisions included the elimination of some unflattering remarks about Cortés's mother, Doña Catalina Pizarro Altamirano and the excessively liberal characterization of Cortés's youthful adventures. Gómara also omits his own presence at the Battle of Algiers.

use of irony in rhetorical history evokes and emotional response as well as rational conviction” which may involve the reader in an “imaginative re-creation of difficult choice” (Struever 133-4). Gómara seems to give his reader the chance to draw his or her own conclusions as to how Cortés decided to take his transgressive actions, and the ways in which such actions might be exemplary for the future of Spanish imperial expansion and the constitution of Spanish identity.

Given Gómara’s large-scale project and complex theme, however, I think it is necessary to start by revising the common conception that “Gómara presented a euphoric vision of a nearly bloodless conquest and subsequent conversion of thousands of natives,” as Rolena Adorno states in *Polemics of Possession* (133). On the contrary, the ambiguity and irony of Gómara’s approach to the *Conquest of Mexico* must be emphasized. Many times he presents the victories and “achievements” of the Spaniards in a mode that we could call ‘euphoric,’ but his narrative of their many defeats, mutinies, and civil wars, as well as the events of the life of Cortés, is often shocking and horrific. This contradictory combination is what seizes the reader’s attention, and makes the narrative so rich. For example, during the Spaniards’ attempt to retake Tenochtitlán in their skirmishes on the outskirts of the city, Gómara includes disturbing details, such as that the Spaniards “padecían este día muy gran sed [...] como porque aquel río estuvo tinto en sangre; y no pudieron beber de él por un buen espacio de tiempo” [suffered great thirst on this day (...) because that river was darkened with blood; and they couldn’t drink from it for a good length of time] (199). Later, in the battle Tenochtitlán itself, Gómara writes that “No se pudo saber cuántos fueron los muertos, mas de que la laguna parecía de sangre” [It wasn’t possible to know how many were among the dead, but only that the lake seemed to be of blood] (209). While Gómara exalts what he sees as the Spanish triumph, he doesn’t shy from enveloping his reader in an exuberance of detail, often bloody and bodily in

nature.

Gómara's technique of detailed vividness, however, sometimes comes at the expense of clarity, which he must have recognized. After the end of the chaotic and protracted battle for Tenochtitlán, which ended on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1521, the historian offers a summary of what happened along the way, suggesting the reader might wish to have the "facts," after having "experienced" the events (229). This chapter, CXLIV, "De la toma de México" [On the taking of Mexico], serves as a portrait-style remembrance of a momentous event, rather than as a recreation of the action, chaos, and depth of life enacted in the preceding chapters. I quote the first few lines of the summary: "Duró el cerco tres meses. Tuvo en él doscientos mil hombres, novecientos españoles, ochenta caballos, diez y siete tiros de artillería, y trece bergantines y seis mil barcas" [The siege had lasted three months. In it Cortés had 200,000 Indian friends, 900 Spaniards, 80 horses, 27 pieces of artillery, 13 brigantines, and 6000 canoes] (229). The resemblance of this summary to detached, portrait-style writing may also serve to remind us how Gómara's biography of Cortés is so much more than a portrait—it is meant to be alive, in motion, overwhelming.

Significantly, even his summary, tame by comparison, is a mixture of euphoria and horror, exemplified by the following image: "Cortés hizo hacer muchas y grandes fuegos en las calles, por alegrías, y por quitar el mal hedor que los encalabriaba" [Cortés ordered many big fires lit in the streets, in order to celebrate, but also to get rid of the suffocating stench] (229). Likewise, following this disconcerting moment, a relatively humane action is coupled with a horrid one about the conquistador: "Enterró los muertos lo mejor que pudo. Herró muchos hombres y mujeres por esclavos con el hierro del rey" [He buried the dead the best he could, and branded many men and women as slaves with the King's iron] (229). This pattern, which includes the combination of inhumanity with compassion—a kind of *chiaroscuro* of sentiment and

action— repeats itself throughout the text as one of Gómara's primary tools in the writing of Cortés's biography.

*Cortés, Gómara, and Spanish Law*

Gómara's combination of repulsion and elation reflects the precarious underpinnings of life and narrative in Spanish imperial expansion, revolving around the tensions between sovereign and outlaw, and the contested character of the imperial hero. It is appropriate here to recall, however, the importance of the law not only to Cortés's person and story, but also to Gómara as a historian who chose him for his subject. The law was a formidable force for sixteen-century Spanish historians. Historiography, as a "branch of the State's discourse," in many ways served as the narrative of seigneurial authority. As I discussed in the Introduction, González Echevarría explains this clearly in his *Myth and Archive*:

In the sixteenth century writing was subservient to the law. One of the most significant changes in Spain, as the Peninsula was unified and became the center of an Empire, was the legal system, which redefined the relationship between the individual and the body politic and held a tight rein on writing. Narrative, both fictional and historical, thus issued from the forms and constraints of legal writing. Legal writing was the predominant form of discourse in the Spanish Golden Age. It permeated the writing of history [and] sustained the idea of Empire (46).

It is worth noting that Gómara's technique of life writing at some level sought "enfranchisement and [...] validation" (47) for Cortés, despite what Victor L. Frankl has called "el amenazante problema cortesiano de la violación de la Ley" [the threatening Cortesian problem of the violation of the Law] (108). Both the historian and his subject were caught in the "web of the law" (González Echevarría 51): Gómara, by writing history, and Cortés, by breaking, and creating, laws. In effect, the contradictions and duplicity that for Cortés have a deeply legal character are rooted in

contradictions inherent in the foundation and practice of Spanish imperial sovereignty, especially in the exploration of the Americas.<sup>63</sup>

In his classic article, “Imperio particular e imperio universal en las cartas de relación de Hernán Cortés,” Frankl explores the legal paradoxes at the heart of Cortés’s letters to Charles V. Cortés, who had studied law in his youth, was well acquainted with the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso X the Wise, and other foundational laws of Spain. The legal quandaries of Cortés’s letters reflected the problems of the form of empire that the conquest would result in, and the sovereign’s rights accorded thereto. Specifically, Cortés was concerned with his *own* sovereign rights in Mexico. These concerns and constructions are present, as well, in the *Conquest of Mexico*. As Gómara repeatedly claims, Cortés had a plan all along: to conquer Mexico—to take it over, gain its riches, its souls, not only in the service of Charles V and Spain, but also in the service of his own ambition. In Gómara’s assessment, Cortés deserved the governorship of Mexico because, if it weren’t for him, the Spanish would have turned back long before. His mix of diplomacy and terror earned him the “respect” or fear of the Aztec people, who recognized him as the leader of the Spaniards and the representative of a faraway lord. For all his dissimulation, cunning, and double-edged words, which Gómara fully exposes, Cortés is clearly aware of the legal confusion that resulted from his ambitions and from breaking with Diego Velázquez’s authority as governor of Cuba. Velázquez issued his 1518 *Instrucciones* to Cortés as a charter for his expedition to explore the Yucatán Peninsula; this document had, albeit vaguely,

---

<sup>63</sup> As both Frankl and Elliott discuss, the dynamic of sovereign and outlaw is a foundational one in Spain, which in the medieval and early modern periods pushed its boundaries towards expansion—from the *Cid* to the *Romancero*, the outlaw was often a protagonist close to, and indispensable for, the king and nation. Both historians recount that Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera* narrates how Cortés knew many ballads from the *Romancero* by heart, and specifically the *romance* “Montesinos se vengá de Tomillas” [Ballad of Montesinos], which has to do with an exiled outlaw who seeks legitimacy with the king through the booty he captures, thereby ridding himself of his enemy and immediate superior (For Cortés, this was Diego Velázquez). See Frankl, 110.



limited and laid claim to Cortés's explorations of Mexico.<sup>64</sup> Further, Spain had no legal right to conquer or settle Mexico, as it was not a territory ceded to the Crown by papal donation, as the *Indias occidentales* had been. As Frankl explains, Cortés had not only to exculpate himself, he had to establish Spanish right to dominion in Mexico, even while he carved a suitable space for himself to rule with a large degree of independence from Spain and her other American colonies.

Traditionally and legally speaking, Spanish rights to annex other empires had depended on two major factors from an Iberian perspective; rarely could these concepts be adequately translated to other cultures, particularly Native American cultures. In the absence of a papal donation or a "just war," the *Siete Partidas* dictated that for any nation, such as the Aztec Empire, to become part of the Spanish Empire, it first had to be established that the Spanish King or Emperor was the natural heir and lord of the people. Second, if the juridical justification of annexation was secular in nature rather than religious, the would-be Emperor had to be elected by the local rulers and the current sovereign had to voluntarily submit to him. Both of these factors had little or nothing to do with the brutal reality of how the Mexican conquest was carried out: with alliances, artillery, horses, deceit, genocidal violence, not to mention the intervening factor of epidemic disease in the form of smallpox. Yet once the carnal and ruthless part of the conquest had been enacted, the legal fictions had to legitimize the otherwise bloody scenes, attempting to weave them back into the official narrative of nation and empire that Spain—always using the legal to hide or legitimize the

---

<sup>64</sup> In the *Instrucciones*, Velázquez primarily ordered Cortés to see if Yucatán was an island or part of mainland, and to maintain Velázquez's pending claim to the region; the governor also asked Cortés to look for a lost crew headed by Juan de Grijalva, now thought captive, but who had actually already returned to Cuba (Martínez I: 45-57). Velázquez was trying to gain authority, through the court, to become *adelantado* of any lands discovered beyond the Yucatán. Although at the time Cortés left on his expedition, this authorization had not come through, Velázquez's personal connections at court assured that it was imminent, and, as such, Cortés—to satisfy his own ambitions as conquistador—had to act hastily (Elliott 1971: xiv). The instructions, however, do refer to cases of "necessity" and grant Cortés considerable authority to act in Velázquez's stead. Although it is clear that Cortés went too far in his interpretation of the *Instrucciones*, many of his actions were in accordance with this document.

violence it rested upon—had become expert in crafting, even by the 1520s. As we have seen, law was the underlying basis for recognition and “a sense of worth,” which, for many Spaniards and the Spanish State itself, meant “a sense of being” (González Echevarría 47).

Cortés thus invents in his letters to Charles V, and Gómara repeats in his *Conquest of Mexico*, a fictional Aztec protohistory that claims a universal kinship: that the Aztecs are descendents of Europeans, and that they themselves assert this, as Gómara shows in Moctezuma’s speech in Chapter XCII. Second, Cortés relates a fictional meeting of elders and nobles, in which they recognize Charles V as their emperor. Gómara narrates these events seamlessly, as if, looking backwards, they may have been a “reality,” or suggesting that Cortés, through his deeds and action was in fact capable of forging a new reality outside of the law, paradoxically, by recognizing the law of his forebears and Charles V. This capacity for legal fiction is nowhere more clearly seen in the conquistador’s manner of founding Veracruz, New Spain’s first city.

*“En manos de Fernando Cortés”: Crafting legitimacy in Veracruz*

Gómara’s description of the foundation of this mythical city on the coast of Mexico, and the setting up of a provisional government, also brings to light Cortés’s conception of his own power. Gómara reports: “tomó la posesión de toda aquella tierra con la demás por descubrir, en nombre del emperador don Carlos, rey de Castilla. [...] Cortés entonces nombró alcaldes, regidores, procurador, alguacil, escribano y todos los demás oficios a cumplimiento del cabildo entero, en nombre del emperador, su natural señor” [he took possession of all that land with the rest yet to be discovered, in the name of the emperor Charles, King of Castile (...) Cortés then

named mayors, advisors, attorneys, sheriffs, notaries and all the rest of the officials to complete the entire council, in the name of the Emperor, his natural lord] (53). The text does not state where the authority to name this council came from, although traditional laws in Castile did allow for small towns to designate their own officers. The newly-appointed officials promptly embue Cortés with a more “legitimate” title: captain and “justicia mayor,” in order to “darle poder y autoridad para lo que tocasse a la guerra y conquista, entre tanto que el emperador otra cosa acordase y mandase” [give him power and authority for things related to war and the conquest, until such time that the emperor decide and order something else]. Gómara is unabashed in commenting that Cortés accepts the office of Captain and judge in this circular motion “a pocos ruegos, porque no deseaba otra cosa más por entonces” [without protest, because he didn’t want anything more than that at the time] (54).

The historian doesn’t hide the fact that Cortés’s ascension to power, although through a presumed “election,” is effectively an act of self-appointment justified by so-called necessity, but not authorized by Charles V in any sense. Even as Cortés legitimizes the annexation of New Spain—and the “election” of Charles V as “Emperador de la Nueva España”—in his letters, he is really more interested in proposing an “imperio particular,” or separate empire. This empire, most importantly, would be under separate jurisdiction from the West Indies. It would belong to Spain’s increasingly ‘universal’ Empire, but would assert its own, indivisible independence at the same time.

Even though he seems very much the outlaw in these maneuverings, Cortés is actually acting in keeping with Spanish legal traditions. The *Siete Partidas* permitted law to be set aside if it were the consensus of the “good men of the land” – in this case, defined as Cortés and his followers, or if there were a state of emergency (Elliott 1971: xix). Still, this doesn’t diminish the fact that the official and the law, for Cortés,

had always been problematic, as Gómara portrays with singular humor and irony. He takes pains to include anecdotes, some of which were censored by Cortés family, which both characterize Cortés as bold and unconventional, and poke fun at the formidable conquistador, thus demonstrating the historian's power, far from the battlefields. From the outset, however, Gómara is sure to establish that Cortés was a faithful vassal—insofar as it enabled his own designs.

When Cortés encounters one of the first groups of Amerindians in Mexico, the “Pontonchan,” apparently allies of Cortés, Gómara phrases the event as follows: “dieron la obediencia y vasallaje al rey de España en manos de Fernando Cortés” [they pledged obedience and service to the king of Spain, through the hands of Fernando Cortés](42). This is perhaps the most accurate phrasing one could render, to carefully and subtly satisfy the exigencies of *imperio universal* while enabling, at the same time, the desires of *imperio particular*. By using the image of Cortés's hands, Gómara ensures that the reader not only understands figuratively that he is in power, but that he literally extracts it from the people and the land *with his hands*. And sometimes, in Cortés's techniques of amity and terror, that would mean cutting the hands of alleged “spies,” or binding the hands of kings and lords, or tying the hands of his enemies to the posts before their public burnings. This phrase resonates with the embrace Moctezuma spurned upon his first meeting with Cortés, with the many alliances made on a handshake, and the murders committed with the pull of a trigger, or twist of a sword; it resonates with Cortés hands pressed in prayer before battle. They are the hands Moctezuma reciprocally offered to Cortés: “A la puerta tomó Moctezuma de la mano a Cortés y lo metió dentro de una gran sala; lo puso en un rico estrado, y le dijo: “En vuestra casa estáis; comed, descansad y haced placer; que luego torno” [At the door, Moctezuma took Cortés by the hand and took him into a great room; he put him on a luxurious platform and told him, ‘You are in your own home; eat, rest, and enjoy;

and I will return later’] (110). For Gómara, the power is in these hands: a crucible of illustrious sovereignty, lawful or not.<sup>65</sup>

Rex Justus or Tyrannus?: *Probing Cortés’s Complexity*

Gómara portrays Cortés as a rebel who helps others rebel, always in the name of expanding Empire and the Catholic faith (and his own grandeur), iterating the fundamental opposition of *rex justus* and *tyrannus*,<sup>66</sup> as articulated by St. Augustine (Frankl 128). Which of these best describes Cortés, Gómara leaves in doubt, but it is a main tenet of this biography that he is a self-made man worthy of the power he acquired. This assertion is most evident in Gómara’s comparison of Cortés to ‘Arūdj Barbarossa. In order to emphasize the importance of the destruction of Cortés’s ships at Veracruz in 1519, the historian again draws a parallel to the “life” of the elder Barbarossa: “Pocos ejemplos de éstos hay, y aquéllos son de grandes hombres, como fue Omich Barbarroja, del brazo cortado, que pocos años antes de esto quebró siete galeotas y fustas por tomar a Bujía, según largamente yo lo escribo en las batallas de mar de nuestros tiempos” [There are few examples of these, and those are the great men, as was ‘Arūdj Barbarossa, of the amputated arm, that a few years before this destroyed seven small galley ships and fustes in order to take Bugía, as I describe at length in the sea battles of our times<sup>67</sup>] (72). Significantly, the episode that Gómara refers to in his *Guerras de mar del Emperador Carlos V* is followed by the description of how Barbarossa became “king” of Algiers (Gómara 2000: 94). If Cortés’s most bold and unparalleled great actions compare him to Spain’s greatest enemy, a corsair

---

<sup>65</sup> Glen Carman shows how Gómara also makes a pun to parallel Cortés’s *maña* with his *manos*, in description of his character (101).

<sup>66</sup> This opposition may be summarized as follows: *Rex Justus* belongs to the kingdom of God, while *Rex Tyrannus* belongs to the kingdom of Satan. See Frankl 122.

<sup>67</sup> Published in 2000, as *Guerras de mar de Carlos V*, eds. Miguel Angel Ibarra and Nora Edith Jiménez. See also note 26 below.

and “king,” then one must wonder what kind of “*rex justus*” best fits the needs of the new Spanish Empire—because it is this “*rex*” that Gómara asserts as corresponding to the conquistador. Yet only a few chapters after this commentary on Barbarossa, Gómara reports how Cortés cut the hands of fifty “spies” so his indigenous adversaries “*verían quién eran los españoles*” [would see who the Spaniards were] (85). Although these tactics of terror, audacity, and destruction seem to have been effective, Gómara has to navigate the challenge of portraying them as just.

The Aztec emperor, Moctezuma,<sup>68</sup> too, is crucial in defining the character of the sovereign in Cortés’s life history, allowing Gómara to explore the problematic of *rex justus* and *tyrannus* from a different angle. Rather than simply dismissing Moctezuma as a cruel tyrant, Gómara’s detailed portrait of the Aztec “sovereign” is lengthy, compassionate, and reveals his virtues and vices. It extends from chapter LXV (Moctezuma’s reception of Cortés) to LXXVII (describing the tribute Moctezuma received).<sup>69</sup> This portrait further continues throughout Moctezuma’s imprisonment until his death, allegedly at the hands of his own subjects. Notably meticulous, these chapters serve as a life history in miniature (albeit in portrait-style) of Moctezuma and allow the reader to marvel at the apparent equivalencies of sovereignty between Spain and Mexico before the Aztec Emperor’s imprisonment. Even though he was not always accurate, Gómara took delight in the minutia of Aztec Court culture, and conveyed his delight to his readers. At the same time, Gómara associates the Aztec religion with Satan. Perhaps because of this, there is an elegiacal

---

<sup>68</sup> Sonia V. Rose summarizes the problematic of the spelling of Moctezuma’s name as follows, in her essay “‘The Great Moctezuma’: A literary portrait in sixteenth century Spanish American Historiography,” note 1: “Cortés spells it as ‘Mutezuma,’ Díaz del Castillo as ‘Montezuma,’ Gómara as ‘Moteczuma.’ Other spellings to be found in sixteenth- and seventeenth century historians are ‘Motecuhzoma’ (Alva Ixtilxochitl), ‘Motezuma’ (Salazar and Solís), ‘Motexuhzoma’ (Durán) and ‘Motecuhuma’ (Torquemada). ‘Moctezuma’ is the spelling most currently used.” I have opted to use this last spelling as well, but the issue of “spelling” his name is already problematic on some level.

<sup>69</sup> Sonia V. Rose correctly asserts in her study of Gómara’s Moctezuma that the “literary portrait in the chronicles dealing with the Indies” is “a rich yet unexplored field of research” (110).

tone to Gómara's writing: he communicates an acceptance of the "necessity" and glory of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, but also an acknowledgment of the great losses it entailed. The minutiae of Moctezuma's city overwhelm the reader, even though Gómara claims that "Antes me acorto que alargo" [I will say less rather than more], implying that the subject far exceeds the text's, the historian's, or the reader's capacity for complete understanding.

Despite this, Gómara attempted to make a vivid approximation of a place he had never seen, smelled, or heard, perhaps for his own sake as much of that of the reader. The sensuality of Gómara's description of Moctezuma's kingdom, his court, his possessions, and his person is, at times, very poignant, although limited by the interests of capitalism and imperialism, second-hand information, and the faulty translation of Aztec culture onto Spanish. Chapter LXXV, entitled "Los jardines de Moteczuma" [The Gardens of Moctezuma], offers an example of Gómara's eloquent descriptions. I quote a large part of it to illustrate the full effect of his words:

Además de las casas ya mencionadas, tenía también otras muchas de placer, con muy buenos jardines solamente de hierbas medicinales y olorosas, de flores, de rosas, de árboles de olor, que son infinitos. Era para alabar al creador tanta diversidad, tanta frescura y olores. El artificio y delicadeza con que están hechos mil personajes de hojas y flores. [...] Tenía asimismo fuera de México casas en bosques de gran circuito y cercados de agua, dentro de las cuales había fuentes, ríos, albercas con peces, conejeras, vivares, riscos y peñones por donde andaban ciervos, corzos, liebres, zorras, lobos y otros animales semejantes para caza [...] Tantas y tales eran las casas de Moctezumacín, que pocos reyes en eso se le igualaban.

[Apart from the houses already mentioned, Moctezuma had many other pleasure-houses, with very good gardens comprised only of medicinal and fragrant herbs, of flowers, of roses, of fragrant trees, which are infinite. It was something to make one praise the Creator to see such variety, coolness, and perfume, and the skill and delicacy with which a thousand different figures had been fashioned out of leaves and flowers [...] Likewise he also had outside of Mexico city homes in the forests of great expanse, surrounded by water, with springs, rivers, fishponds, rabbit warrens, breeding grounds, and crags and rocks where deer, roe deer, hares, foxes, wolves, and other similar animals for hunting lived [...] So many and great were the houses of King Moctezuma, that they were equaled by only a few kings] (121).

In this passage, and the numerous others like it in this section of the *Conquest of Mexico*, the reader cannot fail to apprehend Gómara's preoccupation with interiority, the secrets of alterity, and what is lost in the conquest: the abundance and wealth that Cortés is able to appropriate and destroy. The lengthy enumerations of flowers and animals, which convey the natural but cultivated abundance of Moctezuma's Empire, leads to Gómara's final assessment of Moctezuma that he only found his equal in "a few kings." It is not just a matter of wealth; what fascinates Gómara is the sovereign's refinement, his imagination, and the great organization of energy and resources of the Mexican Empire. The approach to Moctezuma's life, as shown in this excerpt, repeats in the various chapters dealing with the Aztec sovereign: luxurious detail, lengthy lists, and admiration exalting Moctezuma to the level of the greatest of kings. For Gómara, despite his "pagan" status, Moctezuma could serve as an example to European monarchs for his elegance and cultivation.

Sonia V. Rose notes Gómara's high regard for this foreign king, compared to coetaneous portraits of the Ottoman Sultans—the most salient example of non-Christian sovereigns that were represented in sixteenth-century Spanish historiography. Despite Moctezuma's pagan practices, Gómara portrays the Aztec 'monarch' as free of "cruelty, envy, and wrath," in addition to "fair, just and prudent" (124-5). On the whole, he is presented as a "civilized 'European' prince" in the tradition of the *Setenario* and *Siete Partidas* (126). Despite his alterity, Moctezuma earned an immediate place among the portraits of *viri illustre* of the sixteenth century, included in a collection, *Les Vrais Portraits et Vies des hommes illustres* (Paris, 1584) by the French royal cosmographer, André Thévet (130). Yet this was a prince of a lost world, and Gómara's portrait of Moctezuma turns into an elegy of what might have been, had the sovereign and his Empire not been destroyed for Spain's continued glory.



Although Gómara is not particularly known for his cultural relativism nor for his deep regard for Amerindians, there are many moments of empowerment of the indigenous in his life history of Cortés. Moctezuma's portrait<sup>70</sup> is the most involved example of this kind of appreciation of a foreign culture and political system, even as it is translated into European terms of evaluation and esteem. I am inclined to agree with other scholars, however, that his exaltation of the Aztecs mostly has to do with establishing the magnitude of the feat that Cortés accomplished. After the imprisonment of Moctezuma, which follows the main part of his portrait, Gómara writes: "Nunca griego ni romano ni de otra nación, después que hay reyes, hizo cosa igual que Fernando Cortés en prender a Moteczuma, rey poderisísimo, en su propia casa, en lugar fortísimo, entre infinidad de gente, no teniendo sino 450 compañeros" [Never did a Greek, nor a Roman, nor anyone of any other nation, after there were kings, do anything equal to what Fernando Cortés did in capturing Moteczuma, a most powerful king, in his own house, in an extremely secure place, among infinite people, with not even 450 men to support him] (137). Had Gómara not already shown just how "powerful, extraordinary, [and] outstanding" Moteczuma was, with his armies, servants, palaces, gardens, zoos, women (with 150 of his concubines pregnant at once), and riches, then Cortés's feat could not have been so exceptional, nor his person so illustrious, from a Spanish imperial perspective (Rose 130). Yet, even though Cortés would justify that imprisonment by labeling Moctezuma a tyrant, Gómara's portrait of the Aztec emperor suggests otherwise, without resolving these allegedly polar political practices of *rex justus* and *tyrannus*.

---

<sup>70</sup> Gómara also offers a portrait of Cuauhtémoc in Chapter CLXXIX (276-7), as well as the Spanish official Francisco de Garay (242) and the *juez de residencia* Luis Ponce de León (296).

Gómara's *Conquest of Mexico* devotes little time and space to the person of Emperor Charles V, mentioning him infrequently and thus simulating well the role he must have played to conquistadors in the Americas. Charles V was a distant monarch who delegated his authority in order to manage a vast and varied Empire. Although he could and did intervene on behalf of Cortés on more than one occasion, he also proved himself unable to truly comprehend the complexity of events on the other side of the Atlantic—which led to the Emperor's unfortunate decision, in Gómara's view, to remove Cortés from power in 1526. Nonetheless, Charles V did not declare Cortés a rebel or an outlaw in 1520, after the capture and maiming of the conquistador Pánfilo de Narváez<sup>71</sup> (1470-1528), despite the fact that Velázquez's relative, Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, the Bishop of Burgos and head of the Council of the Indies, made a strong case against Cortés. Although Charles V's relationship with the conquistador of Mexico would be always complicated, the Emperor did eventually appoint him governor of Mexico in 1522—although this governorship was suspended in 1526 and never renewed.

The *Conquest of Mexico*'s representation of the early conflicts between Cortés and Narváez, who, until his voyage as *adelantado* to Florida in 1527, was the primary antagonist of Cortés in Spanish court, further illuminates Gómara's focus on the relationship between sovereign and outlaw. In what Gómara deprecates as 'vengeance,' Velázquez's lieutenant, Narváez, and his army come looking for Cortés before the conquest of Mexico, in order to arrest him as an outlaw—which, by all means, he was from the perspective of Velázquez. Narváez, although a royal official,

---

<sup>71</sup> Narváez is best known from as the *adelantado* of the doomed and shipwrecked expedition to Florida in 1527, of which Cabeza de Vaca was the treasurer and about which he wrote his famous *relación*, known as *Naufragios*. Narváez drowned in that shipwreck, in 1528.

was no stranger to cruelty, and was known for his slaughters of the indigenous populations in Cuba, as well as for the maiming of Amerindian leaders. Gómara writes that Narváez, while in Mexico, “también se congració con Moteczuma, diciéndole que Cortés estaba allí contra la voluntad de su rey; que era hombre bandolero y codicioso, que le robaba su tierra y le quería matar para alzarse con el reino” [got into the good graces of Moctezuma, telling him that Cortés was there against the will of his king; that he was a bandit and a greedy man, that he would steal his land from him and wanted to kill him in order to rise to power there] (155). Even Gómara could not dispute the basic truth of these accusations, nor would he hide the gruesome and sensational episode of Narváez’s imprisonment at Cortés hands. He does make clear, however, that the situation Cortés created could only be handled by the conquistador himself. If Narváez were to take over as the lawful deputy of the Governor of Cuba, “estaba cierta su perdición” [Mexico’s loss was certain] (153). The dicey alliances and enmities between Spaniards and various Aztec peoples, the location of the treasures, as well as the baptism of Indians, were all at stake, according to Gómara.

The conflict with Narváez allows Gómara the opportunity to summarize Cortés’s goals and mindset during the time just prior to the sack of Tenochtitlán, and to also show the danger and difficulty of his legal position. Gómara writes that Cortés was uncertain whether Narváez’s envoy had been sent from Spain or Cuba, but knew that only bad news for his insubordinate objectives could arise from the Caribbean. All of his efforts at legitimization of his actions, after all, had been directed toward the emperor, not Velázquez. And that is precisely what angered Velázquez so much: he had been cut out of the chain of command. Gómara claims that Cortés hoped for help from the Spaniards, but feared civil war. In an effort to better serve his Emperor and nation, Cortés at first attempts to bribe Narváez, but Narváez proves himself to be

dangerous and persistent enough in his mission. He puts a bounty on Cortés head: “prometió ciertos marcos de oro al que prendiese o matase a Cortés” [he promised some gold marks to the man who captured or killed Cortés], emphasizing how Cortés was viewed as an outlaw by the officials of the Crown at this point in time. In the same vein, Cortés sees Velázquez as ungrateful for Cortés’s efforts in Mexico, and as bucking royal authority, since Narváez could not produce any authorizing documents from Charles V or from the Council of the Indies. Despite the libel and threats to their captain, the followers of Cortés remain loyal, and the result is a brief, but violent, civil war between the two groups of Spaniards, which Gómara compares to those between Mario and Sila, or Caesar and Pompey.<sup>72</sup>

Along these lines, Gómara renders the dialogue between the Spaniards with great drama. Narváez orders that Cortés “fuese a obedecer al general y teniente de gobernador Pánfilo de Narváez, y a entregarle la tierra y fuerzas de ella; que si no, procedería contra él como contra enemigo y rebelde, hasta ejecución de muerte” [obey the general and lieutenant governor, Pánfilo de Narváez, and give over to him the land and military control; if not, he would proceed against (Cortés) as an enemy and rebel, and would execute him] (158). Cortés responds that “antes moriría que dejarle la tierra que había él ganado y pacificado por sus puños e industria, sin mandato del Emperador; y si [...] le quería hacer guerra, que se sabría defender” [sooner would he die than leave him the land that he had won and dominated with his own fists (force) and diligence, without mandate from the Emperor; and if (...) (Narváez) wanted to wage war against him, he could defend himself] (159). These words exchanged between Narváez and Cortés exemplify the tensions between sovereign and outlaw, though it is impossible to tell who is who: if Cortés is really contesting royal authority,

---

<sup>72</sup> David Lupher offers a thorough analysis of Roman models in the fall of Tenochtitlán in his book *Romans in a New World*, pp. 31-42.

since he acts in relation to what he imagines Charles V would want (while satisfying his own ambitions) and to some degree, within Velázquez's *Instrucciones*; or if Narváez's mission to capture or kill Cortés and take over his conquests and the wealth of Mexico for Velázquez, without explicit authorization from Charles V, is legitimate, or just represents the equally lawless ambitions of the governor of Cuba. Cortés makes it a civil war of outlaw against outlaw when he also places a bounty on the head of Narváez, but the outcome of the war would determine who would "rule" this *imperio particular* with all its considerable wealth.

Gómara writes that, on Easter of 1520, Cortés and his men surprise Narváez during the middle of the night and capture him.<sup>73</sup> With characteristic detail, Gómara chronicles the strategy of the attack, and, using direct dialogue, the reaction of Narváez to Cortés's surrounding and penetration of his quarters. The effect is one of immediacy and shock, as well as a clear victory for Cortés:

al salir de su cámara le dieron [a Narváez] un picazo los de Cortés, que le sacaron un ojo. Echáronle luego mano, y arrastrando le llevaron escaleras abajo. Cuando se vio delante de Cortés, dijo: "Señor Cortés, tened en mucho la ventura de tener mi persona presa". Él le respondió: "Lo menos que yo he hecho en esta tierra, es haberos prendido".

[upon leaving Narváez's chambers, Cortés's men hit Narváez with a pike, which removed one of his eyes. They then took him by the hand and dragged him down the stairs. When he saw himself before Cortés, he said, "Señor Cortés, you have the very good fortune of having taken me prisoner." He responded to him: "The least I have done in this land is to have taken you prisoner"] (160).

With his distinctive dark humor and command of plot and dialogue, Gómara turns the horror of the maiming and dragging of Narváez into a heroic moment for Cortés. The conquistador treats this surprise attack as child's play, having very little to do with fortune, but rather with his own skill and cunning, or *virtù*, summed up by his clever response. Beyond irony, however, was the grim reality of Narváez's maiming and his political imprisonment in Mexico. He would remain a prisoner for approximately two

---

<sup>73</sup> The actual date of the attack was May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1520 (Elliott xxvi).

years before returning to Spain and issuing numerous legal complaints against Cortés, which Gómara also discusses in the *Conquest of Mexico*, as a major factor in “prejudicing” Charles V against Cortés and, eventually, contributing to his removal from the governorship.

Even in his treatment of Narváez and pursuit of his ambitions, Cortés fashioned himself (and Gómara echoes this) as a “loyalist.” Despite breaking with Spain’s officials and, thus, with the legal apparatus of the Spanish State, Cortés saw all royal representatives as acting against the best interests of the sovereign. After the advocates of Cortés in Spain made numerous petitions to the Emperor on his behalf, a tribunal put together by Charles V, in 1522, finally decided that, Cortés could not be stripped of his rights in Mexico because of his debts to Velázquez, and that Velázquez did not have any claim to Cortés’s conquests. On October 15, 1522, Charles V issued a *Real cédula* naming Cortés governor and captain general of New Spain, and providing him with instructions for its government:

acatando la suficiencia e habilidad de vos, Hernando Cortés, e que está aquí e al presente habéis estado en [Nueva España], e regido e gobernado la dicha tierra, e a vuestra suficiencia e mucha experiencia que tenéis della, e indios e moradores, e secretos della; e porque entendemos que así cumple al servicio de vuestro señor e nuestro e de la conversion de los dichos indios a nuestra santa fé católica, que es nuestro principal fin [...] seáis nuestro gobernador e capitán general de toda la tierra e provincias de la dicha Nueva España e de la dicha cibdad de Temistitlán.

[In recognition of your aptitude and ability, Hernando Cortés, and that you are currently and have been present in New Spain, and ruled and governed the said land, and given your aptitude and ample experience in that land, as well as of its Indians and residents, and its secrets; and because we understand that in that manner you fulfil your service to both your and our Lord and the conversion of the said Indians to our Holy Catholic Faith, which is our principal objective (...) you are named our governor and captin of all the land and provinces of the said New Spain and of the said city of Temistitlán] (Martínez I: 250).

This was an incredible triumph for Cortés, who, had he not defeated Narváez, probably would have been imprisoned or hanged without remorse as the equivalent of a bandit. As J.H. Elliott writes, “at last, some three and a half years after his original

act of insubordination [...] Cortés was no longer a rebel—another *Comunero*—but the emperor's official governor of the newly conquered realm of New Spain” (1971: xxxii). Gómara treats this reward as the triumph it surely was, although he also presents the appointment as if it were inevitable. In Chapter CLXVI, “Cómo fue Cortés hecho gobernador” [How Cortés was made governor], Gómara indicates the long-awaited governorship to be a natural development in the course of events. It is an inescapable choice that was impeded for political reasons by the Bishop of Burgos and President of the Council of Indies, Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca: “Los descargos, razón y justicia que tuvo Cortés para librarlo de aquel pleito y darles la gobernación de la Nueva España y tierras que había conquistado, *la historia las cuenta*” [The vindication, reason, and justice on the side of Cortés in freeing him from that suit and giving him the governorship of New Spain and other lands that he had conquered, *History tells them all*] (my emphasis). Cortés's governorship, moreover, is also an appointment that did not arise from “admiración de virtud” [admiration of his power], but rather from “derecho y rigor de justicia” [law and rigorous justice], although his superiors praised his deeds, services, and loyalty (256).

Despite his appointment as governor, without the mighty treasure that Cortés had sent to Spain, as Elliott notes, the tribunal's decision probably would have been different. The charges against the conquistador were serious and, in most cases, substantial even if “necessity” or “emergency” permitted exceeding the boundaries of the law. Gómara lists the accusations against Cortés as follows:

que había ido [a México] con dinero y poder de Diego Velázquez a descubrir, rescatar y conquistar; que no acudió a él con la ganancia y obediencia; que sacó un ojo a Narváez; que no recibió a Cristóbal de Tapia; que no obedecía las provisiones reales; que no pagaba el quinto real; que tiranizaba a los españoles y maltrataba a los indios.

[that he had gone (to Mexico) with the funding and authority of Diego Velázquez, in order to discover, rescue, and conquer; that he didn't turn to him to share the riches or to give his obedience; that he removed one of Narváez's eyes; that he didn't receive Cristóbal de Tapia; that he didn't obey

royal provisions; that he didn't pay the royal fifth; that he tyrannized the Spaniards and mistreated the Indians] (256).

Gómara does not refute these allegations, yet makes clear that Cortés's achievements exceeded the reach of such relatively petty complaints, something that, "as history tells," was affirmed by the official decision of Charles V, "quien prometi6 grandes mercedes, animándole a semejantes empresas" [who promised (Cortés) great favors, urging him on to similar endeavors] (256). This is certainly a euphoric moment in the text. There is an implicit irony, however, in this declaration because, as Gómara's history also tells, these favors and the governorship were revoked within a mere four years.

The protagonist of a resisting history, after all, could not remain within the realm of official narrative and legal power for long. Although Cortés served Charles V from afar, he had always been most interested in serving himself first. Gómara describes the verses engraved in a silver cannon that the *adelantado* Cortés sent to Charles V in 1524, featuring a phoenix in relief:

Aquesta nació sin par;  
Yo en serviros sin segundo;  
Vos sin igual en el mundo

[As this [phoenix] was born without equal,  
I am without equal in your service  
And you are without equal in the world].

These lines suggest the incommensurability and conflict of power between conquistador and Emperor, an ocean apart. That Cortés could afford to send the bankrupt Charles V a cannon of pure silver, a grotesque monument to the power of artillery and sovereignty, is a comment in itself on this "service" and "inequality," which can easily be understood in more than one way. Gómara does not hesitate to make fun of the cannon, as he said others did at court out of jealousy, because of its ostentatious nature, even relating how Andrés de Tapia parodied the verses (259). Yet despite the wealth and power he had acquired on the other side of the Atlantic, once



Cortés came into the “hands of the Emperor,” he didn’t remain in power long. He had fared better as an outlaw, maneuvering for legitimacy, than he did as *adelantado*. Elliott puts it eloquently when he states that “if the Court could make a man, it could also unmake him, and there were reasons enough for unmaking Cortés” (1971: xxxiii). So although Cortés found himself the legitimate governor of the land he so violently conquered, he had to deal with four appointed officials to “assist” him in the government, who also eventually took it away from him. The Spanish Crown, despite having ceded in the particular case of Cortés, could not afford to allow “private enterprise” and insubordination on the part of the conquistadors (xxxiii). Elliott sums up the dynamic that left Cortés “disappointed and disillusioned” by the 1540s: “that those who devise the rules are likely, in the last round, to win the match” (xxxvii). Cortés, who had played by his own rules in order to gain access to “official” power, in the end could not maintain the balance of courageous deeds and calculated cunning that had made him “great” in the first place.

*“A Cortés le debió pesar”: Crafting Cortés’s interiority and ambiguity*

Perhaps because of the incertitude of Cortés’s political situation, and the chasm between intention and action or its interpretation, Gómara was unusually attentive to the creation of a sense of ‘interiority’ in his characters. This subjectivity, wherein new forms (such as the *hombre ilustre*) might be generated or conceived, is one way in which Gómara delineated where he saw continuity with the past, and where he saw discontinuities, one of the essential tasks of the Renaissance Humanist historian. Describing interiority was a challenge towards innovation for sixteenth-century historians and life writers. Gómara seems to approach this problem in two fundamental ways. One is through sentiment and the other is through voice, or

speech. Cortés's inner life and his capacity for dissimulation become crucial facets of the representation of his character and its relationship to his deeds, as well as the ambiguity of these in the political and historiographical realms.

On the whole, Gómara portrays Cortés as a vulnerable human being, with a relevant, if sometimes indeterminate, interior life that makes his characterization more profound while not impeding his heroic actions. For example, during the "sack" of Tenochtitlán, Gómara writes that Cortés, with only 100 allies at his side, "estuvo [...] aquella noche a tan gran peligro como temor" [was in great danger and fear that night] (210). In several other moments of terror and horror, the historian comments on the "pena" [emotional pain] that Cortés felt at the time. In Chapter CIV, the historian narrates the horrible slaughter of so-called 'rebellious' Mexicans, led by the ruthless Pedro de Alvarado, who, with his soldiers, surprise-attacked them during a splendid ritual feast. The reaction of Cortés to this attack is stifled; Gómara, however, alludes to Cortés's emotional reaction: "A Cortés le debió pesar, pero disimuló para no enojar a los que lo hicieron" [It must have caused Cortés grief, but he hid his feelings so as not to anger those who did it] (264). Because Cortés depended on Alvarado, and had already faced more than one mutiny since 1518, and he does not express his pain at the scene. Gómara's narration makes its so the *reader*, however, feels the pain that Cortés may have felt. Carried away by Gómara's respectful description of the feast, laced with Nahuatl terms, the reader imagines the clothing, music, and movement of the Aztecs. This is when the historian unexpectedly attacks: "sin duelo ni piedad cristiana los acuchilló y mató y quitó lo que tenían encima" [without remorse nor Christian piety, the group of Spaniards stabbed the Indians and killed them and made off with what they were wearing]. That Gómara spends a full page narrating the gorgeous details of the feast, and yet springs Alvarado's slaughter on the reader in just one sentence, cannot fail to evoke a sense of horror and grief, thus

allowing the reader to imagine how Cortés “must” have felt, while never being sure that he did in fact feel that way.

Cortés’s duplicity and dissimulation—a microcosm of Spanish double discourses of proto-capitalist conquest and Christian evangelization in the Americas—begins to build layer after layer upon itself in Gómara’s narrative. The existence of the conquistador’s inner life, and its attendant “truth,” remains difficult to interpret in a definitive fashion. At many points in the text Gómara portrays Cortés as feeling “*triste*” [sad] or regretful (*penoso*), such as after the battle for Tezcucó, where he is shown as reflective and remorseful, or at the very least, ambivalent. Yet even this ambivalence revolves around his duplicity. When he begins the siege of Tenochtitlán, Cortés notices how fiercely the Mexicans defend their city, and he feels pangs of regret for two reasons: first, because perhaps there was no treasure to be recovered, and second, because he would have to destroy the city to take it over, as his terror-tactics of burning houses, and destroying idols and towers, were not having the intended effect on the population. This kind of regret, then, doesn’t strike the reader as particularly profound. When Gómara emphasizes it was an extreme loss to destroy, for example, Moctezuma’s palaces, or the bird house, which Gómara calls an “obra perfecta” [perfect work], he writes that, “No había español, mayormente de los que antes las vieron, que no sintiese pena de ver arder tan magníficos edificios” [there was no Spaniard, especially of those who had seen the buildings before, who didn’t feel regret at seeing such magnificent edifices burning] (215). The entire battle is punctuated with these moments of mourning and regret, but the action never abates.

Even though Gómara must somehow preserve Cortés’s grandeur and complexity, he also uses emotion to create a more vivid narrative. In this way, rather than simply narrating facts and events, he creates the sense of a lifelike presence. One example, which shows both the emotion of the defeated Mexicans in Tenochtitlán as

well as of the Spaniards, occurs in Chapter CXLII, “Hambre y dolencias que los mexicanos pasaban con mucho ánimo” [Hunger and diseases that the Mexicans suffered with great spirit]. I quote the bulk of the final part of the chapter to convey the strength of Gómara’s use of sentiment:

Los de México, llorando su desventura, rogaban a los españoles que los acabasen de matar, y ciertos caballeros llamaron a Cortés con mucha prisa [...]: “¡Ah, capitán Cortés!, pues eres hijo del Sol, ¿por qué no acabas con él que nos acabe? ¡Oh Sol!, que puedes dar vuelta al mundo en tan breve espacio de tiempo como es un día con su noche, mátanos ya, y sácanos de tanto y tan largo penar; que deseamos la muerte para ir a descansar con Quetzalcouatl, que nos está esperando”. Tras esto lloraban y llamaban a sus dioses a grandes voces. [...] Gran compasión les tenían nuestros españoles.

[The Mexicans, weeping over their misfortune, begged the Spaniards to finish killing them, and certain gentleman called Cortés with great haste. “Ah, captain Cortés! Since you are a child of the sun, why don’t you persuade him to finish us? Oh Sun! who can make the circuit of the earth in the short space of a day and a night, kill us now and relieve us of this dreadful penance; we wish to die and rest with Quetzalcoatl, who awaits us.” Following this they cried and called to their gods in loud voices. (...) Our Spaniards had great compassion for them] (226).

Examples like this multiply along the length of the text, and in my analysis, they collectively represent one of Gómara’s most honed techniques to demonstrate the magnitude of Cortés life and the conquest, while grounding it in the pain and ambivalence of the experiences of both victors and vanquished. While by no means giving a “balanced” view of the conquest—Gómara is an ardent, yet critical, supporter of the Spanish Empire, after all—the historian delves into the emotions and interiority of his protagonist, as well as of those that were left devastated by his “heroic” actions.

### *“Cortés’s Conquering Voice”*

One of the most difficult obstacles Gómara faced in writing his *Conquest of Mexico* was showing the transformation of Cortés from rebel into a great leader, and eventually, an illustrious nobleman—despite his many enemies, crimes, and

despondency at the end of his life, when Gómara began to conceive and write this history. He achieves a greater sense of Cortés's subjectivity, as well as his powerful eloquence, through the inclusion of set speeches. Glen Carman notes how Gómara used speeches as an occasion to show Cortés's transformation, taking advantage of the speeches' rhetorical nature to "conquer," or persuade, the reader (121-123). Gómara, in effect, features fourteen set speeches of more than 100 words, in addition to several other shorter instances of direct speech (117).

Significantly, Gómara did not include any speeches in his *Crónica*,<sup>74</sup> even though set speeches were a traditional, even essential part of Renaissance Humanist historiography. This suggests that, in his portrayal of the Spanish *hombre ilustre*, rather than the infidel, Gómara opted to shift from only displaying the historian's facility with words to instead highlight that of his protagonist. Voice becomes a key method of bringing Cortés to life. Nancy Struever emphasizes the importance of both this technique for the Renaissance Humanists, particularly in works of a political nature, based on the ideas of Thucydides and Cicero, in his *De oratore*. Rhetorical invention, prominent in speeches, had a direct relationship to the historical consciousness of specific causes and audiences. They thus functioned as the "intellectual armature" of the Humanist historical work, which "expose the structure of history as that of debate and tension" and allowed the reader a more comprehensive view (Struever 127-9). Gómara uses Cortés's oratory to trace the development of certain political values within the framework of circumstance; it was not merely to show his, nor the historian's, virtuosity with language (132).

---

<sup>74</sup> The *Guerras de Mar*, however, does include some speeches in some of Gómara's brief portraits of sea captains. In particular, Gómara's mini-life-history of Count Pedro Navarro features set speeches and resonates with the style he cultivates in the *Conquista*. See, "La vida y muerte de Pedro Navarro," in *Guerras de Mar*, esp. 84, 86-88, and 121-122. Gómara's compendium of sea battles during the reign of Charles V was conceived with the title *Los Barbarroja*, but Sepúlveda advised him against such apparent impertinence; nonetheless, it signals his concern with battles and life writing, much like his *Conquista de México*.

Nonetheless, speeches, while powerful, were potentially false, and full of “wicked” rhetoric (Struever 29). As such, Gómara wisely combines the use of Cortés’s voice with the representation of his duplicity, which included his grandeur and legislative force. In Gómara’s rendering of Cortés’s speech to his troops just prior to the siege of Mexico, in Chapter CXX, “Cortés a los suyos” [Cortés to his men], the conquistador justifies what his troops regarded as a suicidal mission. His spoken rationalizations are a summary of the contradictions inherent in his person, as well as of the conquest itself (we must remember that in Gómara’s work, these two are nearly inextricable). In the speech, Cortés claims that it would not be right to let Cuauhtémoc rule, after the death of Moctezuma, the Spaniard’s “friend”—even though they had taken Moctezuma prisoner and sparked the rebellion and chaos that led to the king’s death. The conquistador and his men cannot allow that an “infinity” of men, women, and children be sacrificed for diabolical reasons, by so-called “sodomites.” In Cortés’s estimation, however, it was justified for the Spaniards to kill innumerable men, women, and children to facilitate the Empire’s objectives: “Pues, ¿qué mayor ni mejor premio desearía nadie aquí en el suelo que arrancar estos males e implantar entre estos crueles hombres la fe, predicando el Santo Evangelio?” [Well, what better or greater prize could anybody want here than to rip out these evils and implant faith among these cruel men, preaching the Gospel?] This choice of verbs, such as “arrancar” [ripping out] and “implantar” [implanting], is quite violent, even though milder synonyms exist in Spanish for these same procedures. The rallying speech, as reproduced by Gómara, ends on a revelatory note: “Luego entonces, vayamos ya, sirvamos a Dios, honremos a nuestra nación, engrandezcamos a nuestro rey, y enriquezcámonos nosotros, que para todo es la empresa de México” [Let’s go soon then, and serve God, honor our nation, enrich our king and ourselves, because the conquest of Mexico is all of these things]. This “empresa,” which may be also

translated as “project” or even business, had at its core duplicity, and profit; and Gómara’s Cortés personified this dissimulation at the ‘heart’ of the Spanish imperial expansion.

The emphasis on his protagonist’s voice gives Gómara the chance to further show how Cortés’s eloquence replaces and creates law. Chapter LII, “Oración de Cortés a los soldados” [Cortés’s speech to the soldiers], is a speech which supplants law while creating a sense of presence, a crucial moment in this history-as-life-writing. The speech, although taken from Cortés’s letters and most likely fictitious, allows Gómara to summarize his portrayal of Cortés’s ascension to power, explain why it is singular, “great,” and worthy of memory, as well as underline its relationship to Spanish sovereignty, both real and theorized. Cortés is able to rally his soldiers despite their fears en route to Moctezuma and Mexico, and quell an incipient mutiny:

Si llegamos, como espero en Dios nuestro Señor, no solo ganaremos para nuestro emperador y rey natural rica tierra, grandes reinos, infinitos vasallos, mas aun también para nosotros propios muchas riquezas, oro, plata, piedras, perlas, y otros haberes; y sin esto, la mayor honra y prez que hasta nuestros tiempos, no digo nuestra nación, mas ninguna otra ganó; porque cuánto mayor reyes este tras que andamos, cuánto más ancha tierra, cuánto más enemigos, tanto es más Gloria nuestra, y ¿no habéis oído decir que cuanto más moros, más ganancia? Allende de todo esto, somos obligados a ensalzar y ensanchar nuestra santa fe católica.

[If we arrive there, as I trust in our Lord God we shall, not only shall we win for our Emperor and King a country naturally rich, but a vast domain and infinite vassals, and for ourselves great wealth in gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, and other goods; and even without this, we shall win the greatest honor and glory of our time; not necessarily of our nation, but of any nation. The greater are the kings we seek, the vaster the land, the more numerous the enemies, so much greater will be our Glory, for haven’t you heard it said, The more Moors, the greater the spoils? Beyond this, we are obligated to exalt and increase our Holy Catholic Faith] (89-90).

Cortés, a daring rebel, is able to stave off rebellion by appealing to the common goals that he and his soldiers share. Despite that Cortés makes a proposal of an “official” course of action without official authority, just the fact that *he* says it in a speech makes it “supplant the law.” Further, by having Cortés’s *voice* present these ideas and

move his troops to action is a much more powerful gesture than simply narrating the deeds or intentions of the conquistador. Carman's analysis of this speech reveals that Cortés succeeds in persuading his men because "he makes them feel as though they belong both to him and to the Spanish nation," despite the fact that these, on a legal level, are at odds (130). Much as Cortés's *Cartas de relación* would serve as the "official" documents he concocted to justify his conquest, his speeches create the "official," immediate context to carry out the conquest. Conflating conquest with biography, Gómara uses speeches such as these not only to narrate events, but also to conjure Cortés's complex political presence, somewhere between sovereign and outlaw.

*'Quien mata, merece que muera, según ley de Dios': Cultivating Cortés's Contradictions*

Gómara rarely explicitly criticizes Cortés; instead, he allows the reader to draw inferences from his juxtapositions of events, words, and actions. This technique most likely is derived from Thucydides, one of the Renaissance Humanists' primary models for historiography (Struever 18). Cortés's comments to the people of Tenochtitlán regarding their religions and "idols," for example, strike the reader as unusually hypocritical. Although to the majority of Gómara's audience, the practice of human sacrifice was an abominable sin, Cortés's language—indeed, his direct speech—lays bare the contradictions inherent to conquest. Entitled "La plática que hizo Cortés a los de México sobre los idolos" [The speech Cortés made to the Mexicans about idols] (Ch. LXXXVI), this speech is important as well for its role in "universalizing" the relationship between the Aztec and Spanish empires, thus establishing a juridical basis for a Spanish conquest and annexation. Cortés begins the speech, directed to the



imprisoned Moctezuma and his noblemen, by drawing a parallel between the Spaniards and the Aztecs:

Todos los hombres del mundo, muy soberano Rey, y nobles caballeros y religiosos, ora vosotros aquí, ora nosotros allá en España, ora en cualquier otra parte, que vivan de él, tienen un mismo principio y fin de vida, y traen su comienzo y linaje de Dios, casi con el mismo Dios. Todos somos hechos de una forma de cuerpo, de una igualdad de alma y de sentidos.

[All of the men in the world, very sovereign king, and noble gentlemen and religious men, now you all here, now all of us there in Spain, or in whichever other part [of the world], who live there, have the same beginning and end of life, and draw their start and lineage from God, almost from the same God. All of us have the same kind of body, and are equal in our soul and senses] (137).

In Cortés's speech, a "natural" hierarchy quickly replaces this universality. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and other just-war theorists used similar logic to naturalize and legalize Spanish dominion in the New World, by inventing an inherent Spanish superiority to native peoples. Cortés expounds that, in this universal brotherhood, some are beautiful, some ugly, some are born intelligent, and others, dull; and it just so happens, that the Spanish are superior to the Aztecs in religion because they are aware of the One True Faith. As such, they are obligated to show the "ignorantes" [ignorant ones] the way. Life consists of three things, announces Gómara's Cortés: "el cuerpo, alma, y bienes" [the body, soul, and goods]. Most indigenous societies of the Americas would find such a schematization and universalization meaningless, because of their vastly different approach to life and the concept of possession, as well as of the "world." Yet Cortés takes it as a given that through these terms he may translate and transfer his desires in a legal fashion onto the Aztec Empire. He claims that the Spaniards want nothing of the Aztecs' bodies or goods, but only the salvation of their souls. While a great many people in sixteenth-century Spain, including Gómara, believed fervently in the necessity of evangelization, we also know that Cortés (and Velázquez who sent him to Yucatán in the first place) was in search of valuable goods and mines. And where there are goods and mines, there are people—to work them,

and to defend them, who could also be conveniently indoctrinated into the Catholic faith.

After describing how the Christian God, as universal Father, made the earth and all its creatures, including Man, Cortés states that “es menester que seamos buenos, humanos, piadosos, inocentes y corregibles” [it is necessary that we be good, humane, pious, innocent, and humble]. For Cortés, who must have only had a rudimentary understanding of Aztec religions and the practice of human sacrifice, the horror of it was enough for him to condemn it and, in tandem, the worldview of the people whose “brother” he claimed to be. He asks of them, “Pues, ¿por qué matáis a otros tan cruelmente? Donde no podéis meter el alma, ¿para qué la sacáis? Nadie hay de vosotros que pueda hacer almas ni sepa forjar cuerpos de carne y hueso” [Well then, why do you kill others so cruelly? Where you cannot place a soul, for what reason do you take one out? None of you is able to make souls nor can you forge bodies of flesh and bone] (138). Speaking through Gómara, and electrified with the force of faith (and greed), Cortés is persuasive, at least to European readers. He also probably terrified his Aztec audience. They apparently comply with his wishes, to take their idols down, but, as Gómara affirms, “les quedó un odio y rencor mortal hacia ellos por esto, que no pudieron disimular en mucho tiempo” [the Aztecs] began to feel a hate and mortal anger against [the Spanish] for this, that they couldn’t hide for long] (139). Even with this recognition that Cortés goes beyond the limits of the Aztecs’ goodwill, as he insults and destroys their gods and religion, Gómara follows up his menacing observation with an assertion that this was an illustrious and worthy act: “Más honra y prez ganó Cortés con esta hazaña cristiana que si los hubiese vencido en batalla” [Cortés won more honor and glory with this Christian deed than if he had defeated them in battle](139).

Serge Gruzinski discusses how Cortés was the initiator of this systematic

“idoloclasty,” or extirpation of the Aztec idols, a process that was “long, progressive and often brutal” (30-31). Once annihilated, the images of the idols were substituted with those of Christianity. In doing this, Cortés had “large-scale political intentions: forcing rich and powerful native states to submit to the Castilian Crown” (32). At the same time that “these political motives were indissociable from the religious project,” the choice to attack the Aztecs through their religion was a perfect avenue for a destruction of their sovereign rights. Thus, the destruction of the idols established a justification for the Conquest: it “ideologically legitimized aggression and justified forcing these civilized people into submission” (32). In these wars of images, as Gruzinski calls them, transgression and sacrilege on the part of the Spanish was followed by restoration and recycling of religious belief into what were ultimately secular, or political, objectives.

Nonetheless, Gruzinski shows that this process was gradual, and Aztec submission wasn’t achieved solely through these dramatic destructions of idols. Nor was the “restoration” free from violence; the battles between the Spaniards and Aztecs came soon. And what would amount to a town-by-town killing spree made very problematic Cortés’s observation regarding the sacredness of bodies and souls, a point that defenders of indigenous rights would make with such intensity in the 1540s and 1550s, when Gómara was writing the *Conquest of Mexico*, that the “mechanism” of conquest became virtually paralyzed in the Americas. Gómara, indeed, seems to want to highlight the problematic nature of Cortés’s conquest. He had to address it in some regard, given the prominence of these debates. In the next chapter, LXXXVII, Cortés orders the public burning of several noblemen, including Cuauhtémoc, for their loyalty to Moctezuma and for having killed Spaniards *in battle*. Gómara relates the dialogue between the conquistador and the nobleman Cuauhtémoc: “Preguntado Cuauhtémoc si era vasallo de Moctezuma, respondió: ‘¿Pues hay otro señor quien poderlo ser?’ casi

diciendo que no. Cortés le dijo: ‘Mucho mayor es el rey de los españoles que vos matasteis sobre seguro y a traición; y aquí lo pagaréis’ [When Cualpopoca was asked if he was Moctezuma’s vassal, he responded, ‘Well, is there some other lord whose vassal I could be?’ almost saying no. Cortés told him: ‘Much greater is the king of those Spaniards whom you traitorously killed; and now you will pay for it] (140). In a sense, Cualpopoca died as a symbol of a violation of sovereignty, not for the individual lives he took. Cortés, who was responsible for the killing of thousands of Aztecs and other indigenous peoples, sets himself apart as an “exception” when he explains the situation to Moctezuma, and shackles the great king, saying “‘Quien mata, merece que muera, según ley de Dios’” [He who kills, deserves to die, according to God’s law] (141). By asserting that he had the true God, and the correct sovereign, and with firepower to back his words, Cortés was able to invest himself with a power to execute a law to which he was not subjected. This is the uncomfortable, but ultimately illustrious ‘paradox’ on which Gómara constructs his history-biography. Beyond prescribed orders (Velázquez’s *Instrucciones*, after all, were rather vague on how the “secrets” of the land were to be obtained), Cortés’s initiative, his cunning, insubordination, and the grandeur of what he destroyed were sensational news, and to Gómara and many of his peers, signs of the conquistador’s illustrious character.

*“Un gran señor”: The end of Cortés’s governorship*

Yet fame of this variety, to Gómara’s dismay, was not the Spanish Crown’s first concern. Cortés was simply too powerful and dangerous, willing as he was to improvise and go his own way. In 1526, Cortés lost his governorship; in 1527, he was exiled from Tenochtitlán, and in 1528, he returned to Spain—physically beleaguered from his explorations in Honduras, by the conspiracies against him, and his

banishment from the city he had striven to conquer. Cortés related to his father in a letter dated the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1526, “Yo quedo agora en purgatorio y tal que ninguna otra cosa le falta para infierno sino la esperanza que tengo de remedio” [I am now in Purgatory in such a way that the only thing keeping me from hell is the hope I have of a solution] (Martinez I: 63, 417). Gómara narrates the intrigues, mutinies, rebellions, and confusion of the early government of New Spain, under the assumption that Cortés was (and would always be) the legitimate ruler of that Spanish colony, or *imperio particular*, across the Atlantic. Others who sought power in Mexico would only disrupt and imperil his achievements; as such, Gómara characterizes them as outlaws or ruffians. This strong bias, which has led many to dismiss Gómara’s version of events, nonetheless allows us to appreciate the historian’s conviction about Cortés’s heroism within Spanish imperial history. It also permits the dynamic of sovereign and outlaw to persist without definitive resolution, leaving the question of “legitimacy” open for debate, even while the critique of Charles V and Spanish official policies remains implicit. It is worth noting that, for example, Gómara omits many of the significant accusations Cortés faced during this period, including the deaths of Ponce de León and other royal officials who came to New Spain to remove him from power.

Gómara relates that, while Cortés is still in Honduras, after resolving the power struggle left by the rebellion of Cristóbal de Olid, and rumored to be dead, news arrives of the chaos afflicting the government of Tenochtitlán. The letters provoke a highly emotional response in the already weak Cortés when he discovers that:

habían prendido al tesorero Alonso de Estrada y contador Rodrigo de Albornoz, ahorcado a Rodrigo de Paz, y que habían puesto otros alcaldes y alguaciles; y que le enviaban preso a Cuba, a tener residencia del tiempo que allí fue juez, y que los indios estaban para levantarse; en fin, le relató cuanto en aquella ciudad pasaba. Cuando estas cartas leía Cortés, reventaba de pesar y dolor, y dijo: "Al ruin dadle el mando, y veréis quien es; yo me lo merezco, que hice honra a desconocidos, y no a los míos, que me siguieron toda su

vida". Se retiró a su cámara a pensar, y aun a llorar aquel triste caso, y no se determinaba si era mejor ir o enviar, por no dejar perder aquella buena tierra.

[they had arrested the treasurer Alonso de Estrada and accountant Rodrigo de Albornoz, hanged Rodrigo de Paz, and that they had instated other officials; and that they sent these as prisoners to Cuba, to be put on trial when a judge was present, and that the Indians were on the brink of rebellion; in sum, the letters told him everything that was going on in that city. When Cortés read these letters, he shuddered with regret and pain, and said, "If you lend your hand to a bum, you will see who he is; I deserve this, as I gave glory to people I didn't know, and not to my friends, who followed me during my whole life." He withdrew to his chamber to think, and even to cry about these very sad events, and he couldn't decide whether it was better to stay (in Honduras) or go there, so as not to lose that good land].

This is such a low point in Cortés's life, that Gómara writes regarding the conquistador's return journey to Mexico: "podrá ser que a muchos no placirá la lectura de este viaje de Cortés, porque no tiene novedades que deleiten, sino trabajos que espanten" [it may be that not many will enjoy reading the account of this journey of Cortés, because it contains no novelties that delight, but rather hardships that frighten] (293). The pain and difficulty of this experience transfers to the narrative, just as Cortés euphoric triumphs did. In this and many other senses, Gómara's "history tells all" in a vivid and lifelike manner.

Although Cortés was received with great "alegrías" in Mexico, it was not long before Charles V revoked his governorship. A document from Marcos de Aguilar (d. 1527), who in 1526 briefly assumed duties as governor of New Spain before his death, attests to how Cortés resisted the order to renounce his position "así de gobernador como de la capitania general e de otros cualesquier officios, cargos e comisiones" [as governor as well as captain and any of his other jobs, responsibilities and commissions] (Martínez I: 387). Aguilar had been appointed governor by the judge who headed the inquiry (*juez de residencia*), Ponce de León, sent by the Council of Indies to Mexico to ascertain the state of affairs there. Cortés dismissed this demand, reportedly saying that Aguilar "No es su juez ni segund derecho le puede pedir ni requerir ni mandar lo que le pede, requiere e manda por tener [. . .] los dichos cargos

de gobernador e capitán general en nombre de Su Majestad en esta Nueva España” [is not his judge nor, according to law, may he ask nor require nor order that which is he asking, because Cortés has the responsibilities of governor and captain in the name of His Majesty in this New Spain] (388). Cortés never fully ceded power, but was eventually exiled from Tenochtitlán and returned to Spain seeking redress of the situation.

Gómara attributes the impeachment of Cortés’s government to the controversies his excellence generated, from those with grudges or jealousy, as well as to Cortés’s long absence in Honduras after the rebellion of Cristóbal de Olid. “Era Cortés el más nombrado entonces de nuestra nación; pero infamábanle muchos, en especial Pánfilo de Narváez, que andaba en corte acusándole; y como había mucho que no tenían los del Consejo cartas suyas, sospechaban, y aun creían cualquier mal” [Cortés was the most famous man of our nation in that time, but many maligned him, especially Pánfilo de Narváez, who continued to accuse him at court; and since it had been a long time since the Council of the Indies had received a letter from Cortés, they were suspicious, and they even believed any bad thing] (294). By “bad thing,” Gómara refers here to Cortés’s plan to arrest Diego Velázquez after his old enemy provoked the rebellion of Cortés’s captain, Cristóbal de Olid, in Honduras. Elliott states that “Cortés’s proposal to take the law into his own hands, and pursue a personal vendetta in the royal name, could only be regarded as conclusive evidence of the dangers of leaving Cortés in untrammelled exercise of his powers” (1971: xxxiv).

But Gómara’s Cortés never seems “untrammelled” in the *Conquest of Mexico*—he is instead savvy, calculating, and even “obedient” in his breaking of the law. According to Gómara, Cortés received the letters impeaching him as governor from Ponce de León by kissing them and saying that “cumplirían lo en ellas contenido, como mandamiento de su rey y señor” [he would comply with their content, as an

order from his king and lord] (296). When Ponce de León died a few days later—many said poisoned by Cortés—Gómara reports that the conquistador “hizo tan gran llanto como si fuera su padre” [wept as if his father had died]. According to Gómara, rumors circulate that Ponce de León had strict orders from Charles V to behead Cortés upon removing him from power, but the conquistador did not—or did not show—that he believed them. Other documents, such as a letter from Diego de Ocaña against Cortés, reveal the complexity of these events and Cortés’s involvement in the “violent faction feuds” in New Spain in 1526. Gómara’s version simply dismisses any other possibility beyond Cortés’s loyalty to Charles V. In his way, Cortés may have felt he was being loyal, and Gómara seems to agree. The historian sums up his view of the controversies, and of Cortés’s removal from power and his exile, in Chapter CXC. Alonso de Estrada, who had risen to power as governor, exiled Cortés over an argument regarding a servant’s behavior. Gómara remarks that Cortés could have defied the order of exile, but:

Cortés lo remedió todo con salir de la ciudad a cumplir su destierro; y si hubiese tenido ánimo de tirano, como le achacaban, ¿qué mejor ocasión ni tiempo quería para serlo que entonces, pues casi todos los españoles y todos los indios tomaban armas en su favor y defensa? Y no digo aquella vez, mas otras muchas pudiera haberse alzado con la tierra; empero ni quiso, ni creo que lo pensó, según con obras lo demostró; y ciertamente se puede preciar de muy leal a su rey [...] Y es el caso que sus muchos y grandes émulos le acusaban siempre de desleal, y con otras más infames palabras, de tirano y de traidor para indignar al Emperador contra él; [...] Sin embargo, Hernán Cortés siempre llevaba en la boca estos dos refranes viejos: "El Rey sea mi gallo" y "Por tu ley y por tu rey morirás."

[Cortés solved everything by leaving the city to comply with his exile; and if he had the spirit of a tyrant, as they accused him of, what better occasion or time could he have wanted to be one then, as almost all the Spaniards and all of the Indians took up arms on his behalf and in his defense? And I don’t only mean that time, but many other times he could have taken over; however, he didn’t want do, nor do I think he even thought about it, as he showed with his deeds; and certainly one can deem him as very loyal to his king [...] And it is the case that many jealous of him, always accused him of disloyalty, along with other infamous words- tyrant, and traitor- in order to get the Emperor against him; [...] Nonetheless, Hernán Cortés always fell back on



two old sayings: “Let the King be my fighting cock” and “Thou shalt give thy life for thy religion and thy King”] (298).

The question of loyalty to the King, and how one writes the life of the loyal subject, is a constant problem in the burgeoning Spanish Empire of the 1540s and 1550s.<sup>75</sup>

Gómara’s agitation in defending Cortés may be explained in part by his determination that Cortés was the model of the man that Spain should have exalted, not persecuted, in order to expand her imperial holdings and strengthen her national character. Such ‘impertinence’ as Gómara was prone to in crafting his brand of historiography was officially silenced by the 1553 prohibition of his book. His narrative, however, never stops celebrating the conquistador in all his complexity. Despite Cortés’s exile, his removal from power, and unsuccessful later explorations to the south of Mexico, Gómara describes how Cortés returns to Spain in 1528, as “un gran señor” [a great lord] (302). He brings along an exhibit of animals and artwork from America, and Gómara states that “hinchó todo el reino de su nombre y llegada, y todos le querían ver” [the entire kingdom was enthusiastic about his fame and the news of his coming, and everyone wanted to see him] (302). The tension between Emperor and conquistador, *hombre ilustre* and criminal, lends Gómara’s *Conquest of Mexico* a sense of intense movement. Yet, as Thucydides warned, there is an “exasperating lack of finality to all historical debates” (Struever 129), and Cortés’s reputation and deeds were caught in the throes of Spain’s indecisive “self-fashioning.”

Although Cortés spent the 1530s in the Americas exploring to the south of Mexico and leading military campaigns before returning definitively to Spain in 1541, it was the decades of battling Charles V’s *fiscal* [prosecutor] that exhausted Cortés, according to his own letters. In December 1547 Cortés died, angry and embittered, in Seville, never making it back to New Spain. Gómara concludes his *Conquest of*

---

<sup>75</sup> As we will see in Chapter 3 with Cabeza de Vaca’s experience in Río de la Plata, this same saying, “Por tu ley y por tu rey morirás,” plays an important role in the factions dividing the city of Asunción as well as Cabeza de Vaca’s own life-history.

*Mexico* with a somewhat ill-placed traditional portrait of the conquistador. Much like Gómara's summary of the battle for Tenochtitlán, this final chapter (CCLII), serves as a summary of the hundreds of pages of "vivid," virtually real life, before it. And like the portrait of Moctezuma, it is also an elegy for the conquistador, and for the kind of Empire only he could help to forge—an Empire that Gómara saw Spain, in the 1550s, in danger of losing. Even though Cortés had many flaws (which this portrait lays bare, including that he was a mischievous child, a womanizer,<sup>76</sup> and a gambler), his life *was* the conquest, and thus, the Spanish Empire. Gómara directs himself to his reader: "Tal fue, como habéis oído, Cortés, conquistador de la Nueva España; y por haber yo comenzado la conquista de México en su nacimiento, la fenezco en su muerte" [Such was, as you have heard, Cortés, conquistador of New Spain; and since I began the conquest of Mexico with his birth, I shall end it with his death] (375). "Fenecer" means *morirse*, to die, and to use this verb as a metaphor for the ending of a book is unusual. Covarrubias writes that "decimos feneció por murió, acabó" [we say "feneció" for died, ended] (889). This emphasizes the indissoluble link between the life of Cortés and the history itself. That living narrative shape, barely suggested by the traditional portrait but fully developed in the *Conquista de Mexico* was, in Gómara's view, the greatest of truths, and thus of sovereignties, towards his vision of a New Spain.

---

<sup>76</sup> Gómara goes even farther than saying that Cortés was overly fond of women; he writes that "Era celoso en su casa, siendo atrevido en las ajenas; condición de putañeros" [He was jealous in his own home, being daring in the houses of others; that's the way those who visit prostitutes are] (375). Cortés's family requested this phrase to be omitted from later editions.

## CHAPTER 3

### “Por tu rey y tu ley morirás<sup>77</sup>”: The Economy of Autobiography in Cabeza de Vaca’s *Comentarios*

History’s secrets are hinted at, but not told, in narrative accounts like Cabeza de Vaca’s. This is what keeps alive the potential for rereading, retelling, and reinventing the tale over the centuries. The historical protagonist as narrator is not a well-rounded figure; he conceals more that he reveals, in part intentionally, and in part despite himself. His profile, even his portrait, is therefore susceptible to reinvention.

Rolena Adorno (2007: 275)

COMMENTA  
RIOS DE ALVAR NVNEZ CABE  
ca de vaca, adelantado y gouernador dela pro  
uincia del Rio dela Plata.



Scriptos por Pero hernandez scriuano y secre-  
tario dela prouincia, Y dirigidos al serenifs.  
muy alto y muy poderoso señor  
el Infante don Carlos.N.S.

Figure 1: Frontispiece of Cabeza de Vaca’s *Comentarios* (1555)

Not every conquistador had an admiring historian to chronicle his life, as Cortés had in Gómara. The Sorian wrote to elevate him—despite Cortés’s considerable legal troubles—to the status of the ideal *hombre ilustre*, and to propose

---

<sup>77</sup> Attributed by Cabeza de Vaca to a cédula (edict) of Domingo de Irala, circulated in Río de la Plata during his imprisonment: “For your king and your loyalty you will give your life.” *Relación*, 82. Pero Hernández attributes the words to a Portuguese man, who carved them into his wall as an accusation of disloyalty against Domingo de Irala and his band of followers (*Relación de las cosas sucedidas...* 350-1). I discuss this saying in more detail in the final section of this chapter.

him as an example for the Empire to follow. On the contrary, some conquistadors forged their own legacies in print, and this was the case of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (1490?-1559?), best known for his first-person, autobiographical account of the time he spent among Native Americans along the Gulf Coast of North America from 1528-1536, entitled *Naufragios*<sup>78</sup> [“Castaways”] since 1731. Like Hernán Cortés, though, Cabeza de Vaca spent the greater portion of the last two decades of his life in the Spanish courts, losing his title as *adelantado y gobernador* of the province of Río de la Plata upon his conviction of crimes committed in violation of Charles V’s New Laws, in 1551.

In this chapter, I consider the interplay between the law, autobiography, and historiography in Cabeza de Vaca’s 1555 publication, the *Comentarios* [*Commentaries*], which chronicles Cabeza de Vaca’s heroics and hardship in governing the colony of Río de la Plata “at his own expense” during the years 1541-1544: his quest for “paz y amistad” [peace and friendship] with the indigenous population, his ethical reform of the colony, further explorations and conquests, and the widespread conspiracy to overthrow his allegedly legitimate government, infiltrating appointed officials and clergy alike. Cabeza de Vaca’s account, while autobiographical, is written in the third-person and thus was meant to have the appearance of a more objective history, in the tradition of Julius Caesar’s *Commentaries*. Ghostwritten by his secretary Pero Hernández, the *Comentarios* is

---

<sup>78</sup> The 1542 *Relación que dio Alvar Núñez...* was considered a plea for royal favor, and was a progression in a series of accounts of the shipwrecked Narvaez expedition. Among them, I can mention: Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’s version of the lost (and according to him, more historically accurate) *Joint Report* (1536), reconstructed in book 35 of his *Historia general* (c. 1540-1548, but not published until the 19<sup>th</sup> century); Cabeza de Vaca and Andrés Dorante’s *Relación* of 1537 as part of a plan to obtain a royal patent for the conquest of Florida; and the anonymous “Short Report,” found at the Archivo General de Indias, written around 1542 as a derivation of the version of Cabeza de Vaca’s *relación* published in Zamora in 1542. The *relación* was revised and reissued in the 1555 Valladolid edition, which paired it with the *Comentarios*. Additionally, there is a segment of Alonso de Santa Cruz’s *Crónica del emperador Carlos V* (c. 1537-1551), which narrates the Narvaez expedition, and was probably derived from Cabeza de Vaca and Dorante’s 1537 *relación*. Other documentation includes letters. See Adorno and Pautz, 3: 4-6.

constituted by the conquistador's attempt to refashion his life into an exemplar of the exercise of Spanish colonial rule while distancing himself from the more subjective "testimonies" and depositions of the decade-long court battle which resulted in Cabeza de Vaca's conviction as a criminal. The text's proem makes clear Cabeza de Vaca's conception of the ideal king and empire, and as it turns out, the *Comentarios* endeavors to portray him in keeping with these ideals and their corresponding laws. In publishing the *Comentarios*, Cabeza de Vaca sought to restore his reputation, obtain a monetary compensation for his service, and retain the right to sign his name as "adelantado" (see Fig. 1). This title, however, legally revoked in 1551, was never restored.

The signature of *adelantado* on the text's frontispiece, then, is a first indication that something is amiss in this account. Cabeza de Vaca's project of constructing himself as the ideal agent of Spanish sovereignty in the *Comentarios* largely fails, most likely because he *had* violated the law to achieve, perhaps, the very same ideals he asserts in this text. The breach between the highly debated Spanish New Laws regarding the government of the American colonies and the variant practice of those laws on the other side of the Atlantic had to be concealed in the *Comentarios* in order to restore Cabeza de Vaca's reputation while memorializing his life of service to Charles V. This concealment, enacted as the performance of the ideal *adelantado* on an allegedly referential register, is imperfect. Even so, for Cabeza de Vaca to have signed his text *as* "adelantado" in 1555 was a subversive act. In order to restore his image and identity in such a radical fashion, Cabeza de Vaca had to develop a textual strategy that could reconcile the problem of referentiality tied to the *Comentarios'* disguised autobiographical framework with the author's own legal situation in 1555. Certainly, one should recall here Sylvia Molloy's admonishment concerning Spanish American autobiography, that "it is not so much what is remembered [...] but when it

is remembered and from where” (140). Cabeza de Vaca was writing from the position of an aging, convicted criminal, in exile from Río de la Plata. Writing in sixteenth-century Spain had a fundamentally legal character, particularly when addressed to the sovereign, presenting significant obstacles for an outlaw wishing to restore his reputation—or invent a new one. How does one comment on, remember, and memorialize a life that is censured, or even illegal? How does Cabeza de Vaca manage to remain, on the level of the text, an *adelantado*, after facing exile from the territory he once “ruled”?

The accusations against Cabeza de Vaca, as well as his defense, consisted in large part of documents: *relaciones* [first-person legal depositions regarding events in question], letters, memoranda, and *probanzas* [[testimonies and notarial evidence of services provided to the Crown]. Cabeza de Vaca, royal officials, and colonists who were present in Río de la Plata at the time of the conquistador’s arrest provided these reports, which were then evaluated by the Council of the Indies. The language of law on which these documents’ claims to truth were founded had failed to vindicate the aging conquistador in court; rather, they had succeeded in convicting him, and he no longer had recourse to such a method to achieve vindication. While the conquistador needed to ground his *Comentarios* and self-defense in the same language of law as these documents for the text to hold sway, per the demands for truth placed on sixteenth-century Spanish historiography, he could not engage in the same kind of defensive argument as he had in court. Instead, in the *Comentarios*, he devises a literary strategy to restore his reputation and his revoked title. This consists of his repeated allusion to a series of possibly fabricated documents which are not reproduced in the text for the audience to read and interpret—among them, memos, letters, and spy reports. He is able to set forth a different version of his experience as *adelantado*, asserting his innocence, while retaining the air of legality, historical

authenticity and authority on an “official” or “ideal” register. For example, when Cabeza de Vaca narrates how he was shipped back to Spain in chains, he mentions he hid, in the brigantine, a series of documents that would directly counter the claims, imbued with royal authority, of the memoranda Domingo de Irala and other officials wrote against him. The reader, however, never learns the actual content of Cabeza de Vaca’s hidden documents, nor is it clear they ever were used in the governor’s *actual* legal defense. These papers, then, are indicated as containing information that supposedly would clear Cabeza de Vaca of his crimes; however, their details are never elaborated. While the legal “form” of the documents is referenced, their contents, and refutable meaning, are silenced or erased. I argue that through these documents, Cabeza de Vaca subverts the legal stranglehold on his life history and attempts to vindicate himself *outside* of any possible legal argument. If these documents could really have cleared Cabeza de Vaca’s name in court, he probably wouldn’t have been convicted in the first place. Instead, they seem to instead function on a symbolic level, and permit Cabeza de Vaca a kind of textual compensation for the “expense” of his lost governorship and reputation. It seems he also hopes that, beyond the reach of the law, these documents will serve as sufficient evidence to persuade his reader of his innocence and exemplarity as governor of Río de la Plata.

*“Yo soy principe y señor de esta tierra”: Transforming Crimes into Commentaries*

Vital to my close reading of the *Comentarios* is a more detailed discussion of its historical context, authorship, and considerations related to its genre. The historical background includes how Cabeza de Vaca was chosen to be the governor of Río de la Plata in the first place, the opening subject of the *Comentarios*. It is important to note that, even before Cabeza de Vaca’s doomed voyage to Florida in 1527, the

conquistador had sought to be appointed *adelantado*; in general, such appointments were made to those with sufficient capital and resources to effect an intended expedition. In 1540, Charles V finally “rewarded” [le hizo merced] Cabeza de Vaca for his earlier service with the governorship of Río de la Plata, but it is perhaps more accurate to say that the conquistador purchased the governorship of Río de la Plata, a dangerous and chaotic colony, in the hopes of restoring his reputation and gaining wealth and power. When a few colonists arrived at court requesting help for Río de la Plata, Charles V offered the opportunity to Cabeza de Vaca. According to the *Comentarios*, his appointment entailed that “se ofreció de los ir a socorrer, y que gastaría en la jornada y socorro [...] ocho mil ducados” [that he offered to go there to help them, and that he would spend eight thousand ducats on the journey and rescue] (153). The legitimacy of the title granted to Cabeza de Vaca by Charles V, however, was dependent on proof that no one was already in power as governor of this region. The original governor of Río de la Plata, Pedro de Mendoza, had died en route to Spain after leaving the colony in the hands of his lieutenant governor, Juan de Ayolas, in 1536. Ayolas had subsequently disappeared in the upper Paraguay River and was presumed dead, although no death certificate had been issued. In 1537, a lieutenant by the name of Domingo Martínez de Irala (1509-1556) was elected to serve as lieutenant governor by his fellow colonists, and remained in that capacity until Cabeza de Vaca’s arrival in 1541. The doubt as to what constituted “legitimate” rule and sovereignty in Río de la Plata, election or contingent appointment, proved to be an important aspect of the downfall of Cabeza de Vaca. Just three years later, in April 1544, Cabeza de Vaca was arrested by Irala and other royal officials in Río de la Plata, where he was imprisoned in a windowless room for eleven months. In 1545, Cabeza de Vaca was brought to Spain in chains, with over 30 criminal charges levied against him. He



returned from America the second time not as an exotic hero, as he did after the decade he spent in North America, but as an outlaw outright.

The charges against the disgraced conquistador ranged from the unlawful usurpation of the title of governor in Río de la Plata and treasonous abuse of his power—as the prosecutor Juan de Villalobos worded it, “visto que se llamaua Rey e dezia yo soy principe y señor de esta tierra” [given that he called himself King and said I am prince and lord of this land]—to gross mistreatment of the native population in violation of the 1542 New Laws instituted by Charles V for the protection of the indigenous and to curb the power of conquistadors and *encomenderos* (Maura 2008: 237).<sup>79</sup> According to the Council of the Indies, Cabeza de Vaca had abused his power, even though in his defense he would present himself as a perpetual governor, a magnanimous peacemaker, and victim of a conspiracy concocted by those who ‘truly’ rebelled against the Crown’s colonial policies. After eight years of imprisonment, Cabeza de Vaca was harshly sentenced: he was stripped of his titles, including that of *adelantado*, banned from the Indies for life, and was further banished for five years to the *presidio* [fortified city] of Oran<sup>80</sup>, where he was to take part in North African campaigns at his own expense (Adorno 2007: 249). Although Cabeza de Vaca’s sentence was reduced in 1552, following his appeal, limiting the American exile to the Río de la Plata region and eliminating the service in Oran, his conviction and the loss of his titles on the tail end of eight years of imprisonment must have been difficult for this once-powerful conquistador, particularly because the appeal was apparently granted mostly due to his old age and lack of resources rather than on the basis of his innocence. Such events seem to have been sufficient motivation for this experienced

---

<sup>79</sup> See Maura (2008) for excerpts of the documents which detailed the accusations against Cabeza de Vaca, now kept at the *Archivo general de las Indias* (AGI), in Seville, Spain, under *Justicia*.

<sup>80</sup> Oran, as we will recall, is also where Cortés’s sons were exiled to after they headed a rebellion in Mexico in the 1560s; many “illustrious” Spaniards, who were also criminals, ended their lives in Oran, including Christopher Columbus’ grandson.

writer to take up his pen once again. The *Comentarios* were the result.

Given Cabeza de Vaca's aristocratic lineage, dubiously celebrated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Aragonese chronicler Don Joseph de Pellicer y Tovar<sup>81</sup>, the ways in which he attempts to refashion himself from criminal and outlaw to a *caballero* in the king's good graces and worthy of national memory is of special interest to the present study. In the *Comentarios*, Cabeza de Vaca performs the textual role of the ideal *adelantado*, who acted in keeping with the Crown's official policies and laws. Yet the historical context places this self-representation and mode of memorialization in question; as it turns out, gaps in Cabeza de Vaca's self-representation also reveal that the governor's autobiographical "truth" cannot be considered wholly referential in nature. Like most autobiography, the *Comentarios* is also the performance of a discursively constructed identity. It must be considered, however, that the *Comentarios* presents itself as referential—that is, the text creates the near-convincing illusion of referentiality. This is enacted primarily through "generic adjudication," where autobiography poses as biography, which, in turn, poses as history (Molloy 150).

At first glance, the *Comentarios* does not seem to be an autobiography, instead asserting its author to be Cabeza de Vaca's *escribano* [amanuensis and notary] and personal secretary, Pedro or Pero Hernández, with the exception of the proem, which Cabeza de Vaca claimed to have written himself. Yet it seems improbable that Hernández was anything other than a ghostwriter for Cabeza de Vaca, used to achieve more distance and objectivity from the controversies surrounding the conquistador's governorship, a distance reinforced by the third-person narrative voice. The *Comentarios* bears too much resemblance to *Naufragios* to have been written by

---

<sup>81</sup> See Pellicer de Tovar, Joseph. *Genealogía de la noble, y Antigua Casa de Cabeza de Vaca sacada del teatro genealógico, de los reyes, grandes, títulos, y señores de vassallos de España*. Madrid: Domingo García y Morras, 1652.

anyone but Cabeza de Vaca: “podemos ver la mano de Alvar Núñez a cada momento” [we can see the hand of Alvar Núñez in every line] (Maura 2008: 163). The text was “closely controlled” by Cabeza de Vaca, particularly as a project of self-memorialization (Goodwin 2). The text, through its generical ambiguity, dissembles his authorship and control of the project in order to make the instability associated with autobiography undetectable. As such, the reader must balance what the text claims for its authorship with the unreliability of that claim.

Hernández was an optimal choice as the ghostwriter of the *Comentarios* because of his personal involvement in the colonial disputes (he too was taken prisoner in Río de la Plata) and subsequent court proceedings. Per the criteria of sixteenth-century colonial historiography, this helped to establish the text as authentic (written by an eyewitness) and legal (written by a notary) despite the partisanship and subjective claims that dominated the conflict and accusations (Adorno and Pautz). This objectivity could not be found in the *Comentarios*’ first-person testimonial precursors, including Cabeza de Vaca’s initial legal deposition regarding the occurrences in Río de la Plata [*relación*], Hernández’s own first-person *relación* regarding the governor’s troubles in the colony, and numerous other legal documents, such as *probanzas* produced by other individuals present in the colony at the time of Cabeza de Vaca’s imprisonment by Domingo de Irala.

The *Comentarios*’ minimization of the governor’s imprisonment is its largest difference from the legal documents, which take the coup against Cabeza de Vaca as their central concern. Instead, the reader experiences Cabeza de Vaca in action as governor, military leader, and mediator of colonial affairs. In fact, beginning in Chapter 2, Cabeza de Vaca is only referred to as “el gobernador,” indicating the importance of this term to his identity. This protagonism is enhanced intertextually by the fact that Cabeza de Vaca published the *Comentarios* at Valladolid in 1555, along

with a revised reprint of his earlier 1542 *Relación* (see note 2). Their pairing “[recast] both works as the memoir of a caballero’s life,” serving to “memorialize his public life of service to his king.” We may consider them to be single volume in two parts, meant to establish a new legacy for Cabeza de Vaca, with him as both protagonist and author (Adorno 3: 84). Furthermore, the revisions Cabeza de Vaca made to his 1555 version of the 1542 *Relación* mostly reinforce his role as hero, his achievement of ideal, peaceful conquest and evangelization, and the miraculous nature of his deeds among the Native Americans of the Gulf Coast. He seems to have been concerned with reaching a broader, although still elite, audience, based on his creation of chapter headings. These are clear objectives in the *Comentarios* as well, which bears these same stylistic markings.

There were many reasons why Cabeza de Vaca did not present his *Comentarios* as an autobiography, or indeed even as a memoir; one of these was the status of autobiographical genres at the time he was writing. In the sixteenth-century, as Richard Kagan discusses in relation to Charles V’s own secret memoirs, autobiography was regarded with “considerable suspicion” and many believed it “smacked of vanity” (Kagan 2009: 58). In wishing to achieve greater objectivity and distance from the disastrous events in Río de la Plata, as well as to establish a new identity and legacy for himself, Cabeza de Vaca attempted to approximate a kind of “official history,” or what was known at the time as *historia pro persona*, used primarily by the King’s “publicity machine” for political ends (62). This type of history focused on the life and deeds of the sovereign and his “fama” [legacy] rather than the narrative of the “*patria*,” or nation. The Spanish Crown saw the expense of employing official historians as an “investment that offered a hedge against a future fraught with uncertainty and doubt,” although these rulers would also discover that “memory was something impossible to orchestrate or control” (13).

Even in his attempts to seem in keeping with the prescriptions of official comportment and ideals, Cabeza de Vaca was not this kind of “official” historian, nor would it have been prudent to present himself as the equivalent of the sovereign. He was, rather, a partially vindicated criminal who wished to renew his reputation. The *persona* he was most interested in was not Charles V, but himself. As such, to suggest a new discursive truth and self-image, Cabeza de Vaca took some care in choosing this title for his work, as well as its narrative voice and apparent author. “Commentaries,” as we know, was also a traditional type of life writing, which could be autobiographical (albeit in third-person), with an established tradition grounded in Julius Caesar’s *Commentaries*. This classical autobiography was an important model for life writing in sixteenth century Spain, and a volume that Charles V kept with him at his monastery in Yuste. The *Comentarios*’ invocation of the genre of commentaries is significant, implying that it contains remarks or annotations on a primary or original text, as well as on Cabeza de Vaca’s life of “*res gestae*” [great deeds] (Kraus 2002: 1) on an imperial scale, implicitly connecting the individual *bios* with the national *ethos* (Molloy 148). Furthermore, commentaries are usually evaluated as an interpretation which is “‘empirical’, ‘objective’, ‘common-sense’, and ‘scientific’, ‘positivist’ and - above all- ‘useful’,” adjectives which all apply to how Cabeza de Vaca attempts to construct the narrative of his life as governor in the wake of his conviction (Kraus 2002: 2). Commentaries apparently distance the content of the text from the unreliability and undecidability of memory and subjectivity. In the case of Cabeza de Vaca, the interpreted “primary or original text” may in fact be the conquistador’s concealed or obscured experiences as *adelantado* in Río de la Plata, which led to his imprisonment and conviction. His interpretation of past events in relation to his self-image speaks to his present need to render certain aspects of referential history mute in the interests of the empire—and himself. We could say that for Cabeza de Vaca,

historical discourse and “official” practice of the crown’s policy were his mask, or perhaps, as Jean Starobinski suggests in another context, it was his style: the *stylus* or pen which allows his autobiographical story, which had to be concealed, to be written at all after a time of great challenge to his identity. Style, “superadded” to content in autobiography, allows us to glimpse a text’s “revealing indices” of individuality, while apprehending discontinuities imposed by the “inevitable infidelity to a past reality” (75).

The portrait of Cabeza de Vaca’s governorship is meant to be exemplary, not only for future *adelantados*, but also for future emperors, as he makes clear in his proem. The 1555 fashioning of his earlier self is also a plan for the future imperial policies of Spain, an indication of the political interests of this text. The *Comentarios* is, however, unable to achieve a seamless adherence to imperial and colonial narratives of conquest and government. For these reasons, my primary focus in the first half of this chapter will be the narrative strategies with which Cabeza de Vaca’s *Comentarios* theorizes Spanish sovereignty and Empire, and attempts (and fails) to portray its author as the ideal agent of the sovereign. Through understanding how Cabeza de Vaca constructs this ideal persona as both a prescription for kingly behavior and as memory of his own service as *adelantado*, we may better grasp the strategies he develops to bypass the parallel legal and referential problems of his text.

*“Like a good Planet...or like a fatal Comet”<sup>82</sup>: Educating the Prince*

The proem of Cabeza de Vaca’s *Comentarios* is rich for the reader’s understanding of the conquistador’s conception of the ideal king and optimal function

---

<sup>82</sup> This citation comes from Erasmus, when he is describing the sovereign. The full quote is: “in his power it is, either like a good planet to give life and safety to mankind by his harmless influence, or like a fatal comet to send mischief and destruction.” In *Praise of Folly*, 53.

of the Spanish Empire. While the 1542, 1555 and subsequent editions of *Naufraios* were prefaced and dedicated to Charles V, framed as an “appeal for a reward” (Boruchoff 386), the proem of the *Comentarios* was instead dedicated to the Infante Don Carlos of Austria (1545-1568), grandson to Charles V and son to Philip II. As Cabeza de Vaca’s attempt to restore his reputation after his criminal convictions and to obtain compensation for his expeditions in Río de la Plata, the *Comentarios* is mediated through debt and guilt, seeking pardon and the restoration of a person and conditions that were mirages of Cabeza de Vaca’s colonial and imperial desire. By writing his past per the prerogatives of the present, the conquistador’s identity, as manifested in the text, cannot be said to exist before its construction by the text. Cabeza de Vaca’s autobiography enacts what Loureiro terms a “conundrum of referentiality,” that is, the representation of the past self “can be accomplished only through the mediation of established discourses [...] that make an autobiography intelligible” (Loureiro 16). The “discursive performance” of Cabeza de Vaca’s self-image, as Molloy has argued in another context, is “an end product but also an initial figure governing the unfolding of biography,” attentive to the “demands of the present” rather than a past ‘reality’ (150). Another important aspect of this construction of the past self in the present moment of the text, then, is the way autobiography also functions as address of one self to another. Through the mode of apostrophe present in the autobiography, the author, who can never truly restore the past, as Paul de Man has shown, instead writes himself towards the future and employs autobiography as a “discursive creation” of a new reality (Loureiro 18).<sup>83</sup> This is vital to consider in the case of Cabeza de Vaca, who, in writing the

---

<sup>83</sup> For a detailed explanation beyond the scope of this chapter regarding the significance of apostrophe in autobiographical texts as well as its relationship to theories of autobiography set forth by Levinas and DeMan, see Angel Loureiro, *The Ethics of Autobiography: Replacing the Subject in Modern Spain*, and especially his introduction introduction, entitled “Before Reference,” pp. 1-30.

*Comentarios* was interested in vindicating his reputation and establishing his legacy for future generations.

Cabeza de Vaca's apostrophe to Don Carlos describes the conquistador's notion of the connection between sovereignty and historiography, as well as his vision for future Spanish imperial expansion. The conquistador's choice to dedicate his *Comentarios* to the Infante Don Carlos is suggestive and, in retrospect, quite ironic. The young prince was slated to inherit the Habsburg Empire from his father, Philip II, although his untimely, mysterious death, related to his attempted political rebellion, precluded his succession to the throne. Yet even from a young age (Don Carlos was just 10 years old when this proem was published), it was clear that the Infante was probably ill-suited to the task of becoming king, and would need a radical education simply to function in government or in society. After losing his mother four days after he was born, and rarely seeing his busy father, the physically deformed and mentally slow child, lame and epileptic, did not adapt well to society and began to exhibit signs of insanity, likely the result of royal inbreeding.

In the figure of the young Don Carlos, then, the dream of future empire and the problems of establishing and maintaining Spanish and Habsburg sovereignty collided, particularly on a symbolic level. Although this irony could only have been understood in retrospect, the education and exemplarity of the sovereign, so important to Charles V, make it all the more important to closely examine the dedication of a text by one outlaw, accused of proclaiming himself king in Río de la Plata, to a future (princely) outlaw, accused of trying to overthrow King Philip II—his own father—in Madrid in 1567. While ignorant of the prince's eventual fate, Cabeza de Vaca was fully aware of the precarious nature of Spanish imperial power, and so it was an apt choice to preface his memoir with this version of a *miroir du prince*, or mirror for princes. The *miroir du prince* was a genre of considerable popularity in Spain throughout the



medieval period and into the first half of the sixteenth century. It was “a kind of moral treatise for sovereigns written in a normative prescriptive mode” that functioned as a guide for good government and reflected on or promoted “ideals of kingship” (Delogu 9), and was itself considered a variety of life writing. Cabeza de Vaca suggests his own exemplarity with his portrait of the ideal sovereign. As Adorno and Pautz argue, “in the 1555 Cabeza de Vaca publication, the memoir exists [...] as an apology that, understood from the author’s point of view, projects a desired image before the future” (86). The composition of that desired image is revealed, in large part, by the proem, which focuses on Don Carlos’ future rule of the Spanish Empire. The jagged piece of this puzzle is that Cabeza de Vaca is prescribing ideals of kingship as a preface to the projection of his *own* image into the future—even though he was, at the time of writing, tried and convicted as a criminal.

The author asserts that he charged Pero Hernández with writing the *Comentarios* and paired them with his earlier work, “porque la variedad de que en la vna parte y en la otra se tractan, y la de mis acontecimientos, detenga a V. A. con algún gusto en esta lection” [so that the variety found in both parts, as well as within the events of my life, would entertain Your Highness with some pleasure in their reading]. Cabeza de Vaca thus presents his preface to the *Comentarios* as a lesson for an up-and-coming king, to open his eyes to a God-opened world: a playground for the Spanish imperial fantasy of a universal Monarchy. In his preface to the *Naufragios*, Cabeza de Vaca promised to offer Charles V information and knowledge, in addition to explanation, and at some level, apology for not bringing gold back from his North American venture. In the *Comentarios*, however, the service Cabeza de Vaca “performed,” if only textually, is meant to provide an example. It would form part of the Prince’s education, placing the governor in a superior, rather than a servile position. As such, Cabeza de Vaca’s purpose in publishing the account was

educational rather than entertaining: “y assi como los primeros dirigí a Su M., dirigir estos a V. A. para que Dios encomiença a mostrar el señorío y predicación de tantas tierras y gentes, porque en abriendo los ojos de su niñez vea V. A. quan liberalmente reparte Dios su misericordia con los hombres” [and as I dedicated my first (accounts) to His Majesty (Charles V), I dedicated these to Your Highness so that God begins to reveal the dominion and assignment of so many lands and peoples, because in opening your eyes in childhood Your Highness shall see how liberally God imparts his mercy among men] (148).

Opening Don Carlos’s eyes to the vastness and diversity of the Spanish Empire includes the molding of the ideal, educated king for the nation and empire’s continuation, as well as the maintenance of noble families under the sovereign’s rule, on which the conquistador depended for favor and mercy. The convicted conquistador-cum-ideal *adelantado* recommends that the Prince should seek, just as God does, to remove the indigenous Americans from “las tinieblas y ceguedad y tyrannia del demonio” [darkness, blindness and tyranny of the devil] by promoting Catholicism and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such acts are “un negocio propio de reyes” [a business proper to kings], because God has prepared them well for the task of evangelization. The world awaits Don Carlos, “el qual todo espantado y attento espera coger en vuestras siguientes edades de juuentud, virilidad y senectud fructos de perfectíssimo rey” [which, completely enthralled, awaits your growing up, to pluck the fruits of youth, virility and old age from a most perfect king]. God will concede these fruits to the waiting world, because the Prince has been chosen as its future “rey necesario” [necessary king] (149).

The author expresses his faith and optimism in educating the prince, despite his faults. Cabeza exaltation of humanist education resonates with Erasmus’s recommendations in his *miroir du prince*, the *Institutio principis Christiani* [Education

of a Christian Prince], where he advised Charles V to plunge into the study of classical authors such as Cicero, Plato, and Aristotle (Kagan 1999: 188). Education, however, was always a potential threat to the establishment, possibly awakening *personal* power and concepts of sovereignty not in keeping with either tradition or the hopes of the future. As Erasmus warned, the study of history (and of the ancients, many of whom were pagans) could actually be dangerous. “Now I shall not deny that a great fund of wisdom may be gathered from reading the historians,” wrote Erasmus, “but you will also draw out the very essence of destruction from these same sources unless you are forearmed and read with discretion.” The wrong sort of heroes could tempt the young prince with their legendary deeds, creating ambition without wisdom or morality (188). Very often, classical historians blurred the boundaries between hero, sovereign, and outlaw: “When you hear about Achilles, Xerxes, Cyrus, Darius, and Julius Caesar, do not be carried away and deluded by the great names. You are hearing about great raging robbers, for that is what Seneca has called them on various occasions” (201). Reading history had to be done with care, since the education of the sovereign risked inciting the potential to exceed and abuse the law for which that sovereign was responsible.

Like Erasmus, Cabeza de Vaca prescribes the characteristics of an ideal Christian king, albeit implying his own figure as an exemplary protagonist. The sovereign should be: “christiano, sabio, justiciero, fuerte, verdadero, prudente, liberal, magnánimo, clemente, humano, manso, benigno y amable y aborrescedor de todo lo contrario y obediente a aquel que para tan grandes reynos y señoríos os crio” [Christian, wise, just, strong, truthful, prudent, liberal, generous, merciful, humane, docile, mild, and kind, and who rejects all the contrary and is obedient to that which for such great kingdoms and dominions you were raised] (152). Unlike Erasmus, though, Cabeza de Vaca is attempting to vindicate himself and rewrite the decade of

charges and trials that sullied his own lineage. In essence, the proem, and the *Comentarios*, sought to produce Cabeza de Vaca as the mirror of such a king, portraying himself as an ideal conqueror despite his obscure experiences in Río de la Plata. He invokes his own plight and only partial vindication:

Y aunque la invidia trabaje de impedir y estoruar esta tan deuida y necessaria obra, la clara virtud y merescimientos de tales príncipes nos defenderá dándonos Dios la paz, sossiego y tranquilidad que en tiempo de los buenos reyes abundantissimamente suele dar

[And even if envy should seek to impede and obstruct this proper and necessary work, the clear virtue and merits of such princes will defend us, God giving us the peace, calm, and tranquility that is abundantly granted in the times of good kings] (152).

As it turns out, in the *Comentarios* Cabeza de Vaca asserts that Domingo de Irala and the other officials' jealousy was a primary factor in the accusations and the mutiny organized against him, and so, such a comment must refer to the "restoration of his good name" (Adorno 2007: 250): that is, the restoration of his signature as *adelantado*, which perhaps hastily adorns the frontispiece (Fig. 1).

The concluding affirmation of the proem, "no ay cosa estable ni perpetua en el reyno" [nothing is stable or perpetual in a kingdom], speaks to the precarious nature of political authority and governing in a worldwide empire, as was the case for Charles V and his heirs. The intent to use Cabeza de Vaca's textual "conversion" from criminal to exemplar and perpetual *adelantado* to educate the prince, and illustrate the characteristics that would guarantee "abundance and perpetuity" for Spain and her Empire, thus depends upon the inversion of the outlaw in the figure of the sovereign. We must ask, then, how the *Comentarios* constructs Cabeza de Vaca as the ideal *adelantado* within the course of its narrative, despite its being the memoir of a would-be "king" in Río de la Plata, and a convicted criminal in Spain.

*“Con toda diligencia, el gobernador mandó [...]”: Constructing the Ideal Agent of Imperium*

From the outset of the *Comentarios*, the text focuses on establishing Cabeza de Vaca as the legitimate and lawful governor of Río de la Plata: demarcating the scaffold of his service to the crown. The ‘life’ and ‘deeds’ of the governor are woven into a text also filled with ethnographic and proto-scientific details of his experience in Río de la Plata. What seems like narrative irregularity—suspenseful chase one minute, details of fruits and fish the next, without even as much as a period, let alone a paragraph break—is actually a complex illustration of a world, until then, without European coordinates. According to Cabeza de Vaca, the Río de la Plata region was an extreme case of colonial chaos, requiring heroic measures to salvage—or impose—any sense of European “order.” As I mentioned earlier, Cabeza de Vaca agreed to rescue of the colonists at Río de la Plata, at his own expense of “ocho mil ducados” [eight thousand ducats] (154). Despite actions like his naming newly “discovered” territory of the interior “Vera”<sup>84</sup>, after his own paternal ancestors rather than those of the Emperor, Cabeza de Vaca attempted to portray his service to Charles V as “toda a su costa, sin interés alguno” [all at his expense, without self-interest]. He exaggerated the servility of his actions by repeating phrases such as “para mejor servir a Dios y a Su Majestad” [to better serve God and His Majesty] (200). Cabeza de Vaca’s insistence on how he spent his own wealth and merchandise to aid the Spaniards and Indians of the colony and to further expand the Spanish Empire, attempts to convey his magnanimity, but borders on resentment. He repeats, for example, that beyond merely compensating the indigenous for provisions, he paid them *more* than the goods “valían” [were worth], at least from his perspective, ensuring the indigneous received

---

<sup>84</sup> Maura explains how one of the accusations of the Council of the Indies against Cabeza de Vaca was how he displayed his family’s flags instead of the royal flags, taking excessive pride in his father’s family’s involvement in the conquest of the Canary Islands (2008:166).

“buenos tratamientos” [good treatment] (166).

This economic factor is of summary importance for our understanding of the *Comentarios* which “seeks to obtain some economic compensation” (Maura 2008: 175). His expense proves he acted in the interests of the crown, but he also seems to expect to be rewarded accordingly. Cabeza de Vaca concludes the *Comentarios* on this same theme, when he states that his governorship was taken away “sin haberle dado recompensa de lo mucho que gastó en el servicio que hizo en la ir a socorrer y descubrir” [without having repaid the large amount he spent in the service he did in rescuing and discovering] (359). From beginning to end, then, this preoccupation with “expense” and lack of compensation signals the rupture between the ideal and the actual experience of his governorship, and thus an indication that we must read the construction of the ideal in this narrative with great care.

It would seem, then, that it is for rhetorical purposes (and compensation) that the *Comentarios* portrays Cabeza de Vaca as a selfless limb of Charles V’s body politic. The land and people of Río de la Plata could not in themselves offer sufficient compensation to their “governor.” Cabeza de Vaca’s tenure there was distinguished by its chaos, crime, starvation, war and pestilence, as can be discerned not only from his own account of hardship (which impeded his rule), but also from multiple other statements and transcripts of interviews related to the former *adelantado*’s court proceedings.<sup>85</sup> Although the text asserts signs and promises of precious metals<sup>86</sup>, and of passages to Peru, any mercantile wealth was still a long way off. His monetary ambitions curbed, Cabeza de Vaca attempts to demonstrate the value of his role as ideal governor, whose primary actions throughout the *Comentarios* are evangelization,

---

<sup>85</sup> See the documents included in *Relación de los Naufragios y Comentarios de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*. Ed Manuel Serrano y Sanz, 2 Vols. (v and vi). Librería general de Victoriano Suárez, Madrid, 1906.

<sup>86</sup> Because the *Comentarios* was written 10 years after Cabeza de Vaca’s initial incarceration and after Potosí had been discovered (1546), such assertions were all the more plausible.

discovery, and establishment of justice and order. These terms are also called “rescue,” “peace,” “friendship,” or “alliance” in the vocabulary of the *Comentarios*. His deeds are hyperbolically in keeping with the will of the Spanish Crown as was articulated, in even stronger terms, in the New Laws of 1542, which concerned the rights of the indigenous peoples, and the appropriate mode of colonial conquest and rule.<sup>87</sup> The very existence of these laws served as a major pressure in the writing of the *Comentarios*, which also was subject to censorship. In showing Cabeza de Vaca’s exemplarity, then, the text must somehow account for Cabeza de Vaca’s numerous violations of the New Laws—or, deny there were any violations. Further, in idealizing the governor, the *Comentarios* must nonetheless keep his written life within the bounds placed upon it by Charles V, without seeming to *usurp* the place of the sovereign, who establishes official policy—one of the crimes Cabeza de Vaca was convicted of.

*“Muchas mercedes y todo buen tratamiento”: Governing Río de la Plata*

In describing Cabeza de Vaca’s first journey forth from Santa Catalina in 1541, the *Comentarios* emphasizes his role as peacemaker, not only among the colonists but also with the Native Americans in political and military affairs, lavishing them with

---

<sup>87</sup> These laws were made for two purposes: to increase the central authority of the Spanish Crown and to improve the treatment of the indigenous population. Known as “Pro-Indian” laws, and an expansion of the 1526 *Ordenanzas* regarding the treatment of the Native Americans, they sought to eliminate the excesses of cruelty typical in the treatment of the native populations by conquistadors and other settlers. Charles V had begun his push for increased centralization of authority and presence of royal sovereignty in the Americas through the creation of the viceroyalty of New Spain in 1535, intended to function as an embodiment of the King in the figure of the viceroy (McAlister 188). At the same time as the legislation of the New Laws, two main *Audiencias* or judicial districts were established: one in Mexico and one in Peru. When these proved to be insufficient in managing the protests and unrest of the colonists, more *Audiencias* were created, ironically further fragmenting the “central” authority of Charles V in the Indies. The New Laws of 1542 provoked violent rebellions in Mexico and Peru, as they affected the rights of *encomenderos* and their ability to keep Indian slaves, a practice prohibited by these laws.

gifts of the usual variety: bells, hats, and fish hooks. The description of Cabeza de Vaca's reciprocal treatment of the Guaraní Indians is notable, because the governor would later be accused of cruelty towards the peoples of the region:

Demás de pagarles los mantentimientos que le traían, les daba graciosamente muchos rescates, y les hacía muchas mercedes y todo buen tratamiento; en tal manera, que corría la fama por la provincia y region (169)

[More than just paying them [the indians] for the provisions they brought him, he graciously gave them many rewards and did them many favors and gave them very good treatment; in such a way that his fame spread across the province and region]

The trust the Guaraní Indians allegedly felt towards Cabeza de Vaca “era cosa muy de ver” [was something remarkable to see], because of the order and justice he effected among the troops, ensuring they did no harm to the villages or their people. This depiction not only refutes claims of Cabeza de Vaca's cruelty to the Native Americans, (accusations made against by multiple eyewitnesses as testimony in a court of law), but also navigates the danger of his having *too* much facility among the Guaraní. After eight years wandering from tribe to tribe in North America, Cabeza de Vaca had become dangerously close to becoming the other as he learned to survive through the practice of local traditions. As such, it is a challenge for the *Comentarios* to ensure that the governor maintains his distance from the indigenous. Cabeza de Vaca must be seen here less as a shaman, and more as a strategically savvy conquistador, even as he works virtual political miracles among the indigenous. Otherwise he will not be able to project a legacy of nobility and efficacy as a governor through his autobiographical “history,” despite his conviction to the contrary in a Spanish court of law and his loss of the title of *adelantado*.

The very real chaos of the Spanish colony meets the governor as he journeys toward Asunción—a chaos he had promised to rein in. A colonist on the search for Cabeza de Vaca informs him of the “gran peligro” [great danger] facing the people in Asunción, apparently due to the earlier decision by Irala to abandon Buenos Aires, a



better port, where colonists were still waiting to be rescued. In order to get to Asunción—"siendo bien informado el gobernador de la muerte de Juan de Ayolas" [the governor being well informed of the death of Juan de Ayolas]—and realizing the terrible danger his people were in, especially from enemy tribes, Cabeza de Vaca "con muy gran diligencia fué caminando por la tierra" [traveled overland with great diligence], where his fame of 'good treatment' of the native population preceded him and, as such, opened a path for his rescue mission. The Guaraní showed themselves to be "grande familiares y conversables" [greatly familiar and talkative] towards Cabeza de Vaca's group, "como si fueran naturales suyos, nascidos y criados en España" [as if they were their fellow countrymen, born and raised in Spain] (188).

This homogenizing effect, contagion of culture bought for a few bells, serves to demonstrate Cabeza de Vaca's charisma, or, as Gómara might have put it, his "ánimo". Yet despite his popular success, Cabeza de Vaca maintained that he merely acted under orders from Charles V. This apparent passivity is shown to be a strength in the *Comentarios*, as well as a gesture of innocence and vindication, which purifies the governor's legacy. After arriving at the settlement of Asunción, Cabeza de Vaca presumably treated those living there with great love, and immediately establishes a climate of order and justice: in the settlement, "las cosas estaban en paz y quietud" [all was peace and quiet] (235). He is summarily depicted as a savior-governor, unopposed, adored, and yet a humble servant of his king, revealing the idealism and exemplarity at the heart of these *Comentarios*, and the dream they contain for universal imperialism. Certainly, this dream still depended on the Spanish nobility for direction and implementation. Unequivocal phrases such as "El gobernador con gran diligencia mandó [...]" [With great diligence the governor ordered...] structure the reader's experience of the text so that, at this point, the governor seems paradoxically omnipotent as well as selfless, humbly obeying the legitimate authority of *Su*

*Magestad* [His Majesty]. Cabeza de Vaca highlights the goal of “pacificación y sosiego de los naturales” [pacification and calming of the natives] and their “doctrina y enseñamiento” [indoctrination and teaching], since they were “vasallos de Su Magestad” [vassals of His Majesty] (193). The language of the *Comentarios* is obsessively in keeping with royal policy and the New Laws, and at times seems so exaggerated in this coincidence that it undermines the text’s efforts to portray Cabeza de Vaca as a “humble” servant.

### *Unsustainable Ideals, Legal Paradoxes*

Cabeza de Vaca’s textual construction of the ideal governor-conquistador, preserved for national memory, is not free from unintentional disruptions and irony. The ideals expounded in the preface, while perhaps illuminating for a young prince, did not adequately reflect the complex consequences of the Spanish invasion of South America. The colonial project was fraught with physical hardships for the colonists, who, in the name of increasing their wealth and expanding imperial power, exploited, abused, and oftentimes decimated native populations. The New Laws, designed to impede these excesses even while conquistadors were expected to achieve the same objectives, created a paradox for *adelantados* in the Americas: they were expected to maintain official rule despite being on the brink (or in the midst) of civil war against these new policies. Cristián Roa-de-la-Carrera summarizes the difficult political terrain during the time period of Cabeza de Vaca’s downfall and conviction, and its consequence for historiography:

The agitation concerning the well-being of the indigenous population reached its peak when Charles V returned to Spain in 1541 and did not culminate until 1550 in the long debate in Valladolid between Las Casas and Sepúlveda. *The importance that this debate had for historiographical discourse fundamentally rests in the fact that it transformed the conditions within which forms of textual authority could be established.* The historiographical

treatment of questions referring to the Indians and the conquests had to delicately navigate between the pressures of the conquistadors and *encomenderos*, the campaigns of those who advocated indigenous freedom and the abolition of the *encomienda*, and the complicated situation of a colonial administration incapable of implementing effective solutions (40, my emphasis).

The text of the *Comentarios* makes apparent that Cabeza de Vaca had difficulty in these “delicate navigations” of historical discourse regarding the brutal reality of colonial rule, an ocean apart from the elegance, theory, and order of the Spanish court. This navigation manifests in “gaps” in the narrative, eliding conflicts with his subordinates and especially, in minimizing his imprisonment. Ironic situations, furthermore, permeate the text: for example, Cabeza de Vaca’s maintains he is able to ‘make peace’ with the fiercest native peoples, while he continually fails to suppress violent rebellions by royal officials. Another such irony becomes clear in his attempt to rationalize his abuse of the indigenous—extreme, even by the standards of his contemporaries.

On the scale of Empire, this rationalization of abuse of the Native Americans, however, was enacted by the language of the *Requerimiento*.<sup>88</sup> As such, in the *Comentarios*, Cabeza de Vaca tried to show his adherence to this official, if controversial, policy. We will recall that the imposition of so-called justice on the peoples of South America was “legally” achieved in the Spanish view through this document, which the Spaniards used in the field to inform the Native Americans of the sovereignty of the Pope and his agent, the Spanish King. It had to be read by conquistadors (in Spanish) to indigenous populations prior to waging war against them and bringing them under Spanish dominion. Cabeza de Vaca, to the letter, shows how he deployed this war policy amongst the various tribes in Río de la Plata with alarming

---

<sup>88</sup> The *Requerimiento* [“Demand”], used in the field by the Spanish colonizers between 1510 and 1556, is the famous and controversial document that justified conquest and colonization in the Americas (in the Spanish view). Written by Spanish jurist Juan López de Palacios Rubios, it drew on the tradition of the pope’s right to “annul the jurisdiction of heathens and pagans and confer them on Christian princes” (McAlister 90), as was granted to Spain by the Papal Bull of 1493.

regularity in an attempt to show himself as a seasoned military leader, raining down the hooves of his troops' horses on the "enemy" tribes of indigenous peoples, burning their villages, sending them fleeing to the mountaintops. The *Requerimiento* gave two options: submit to Spanish sovereignty, and you will be received as loyal vassals; or be deprived of your liberty and property (and it will be your fault, not that of the Spaniards). Yet this document was meaningless to the peoples of South America, who often didn't have the chance to hear it (even if they could understand Castilian Spanish), and whose societies did not recognize categories such as the "pope," "sovereignty," or "property": these terms were without translation. The Spanish presence in South America and their subsequent abuses of the indigenous constituted a willful invasion, to which the Guaraní, in this case, after earnest attempts at cooperation, responded with years of war and rebellion against the Spaniards. The *Requerimiento* could never be considered just from an indigenous perspective; it instead "[converted] the Indians into a religious and legal fiction" (Cheyfitz 105).

Cabeza de Vaca, in his quest for the Spanish ideals of the *Requerimiento*, certainly misjudged and exaggerated the deployment of this policy. The most famous example of the governor's excesses, for which he was condemned, was the hanging of the Jujuy leader Aracaré, who refused to help the Spaniards in their attempt to find a route to Peru. In the *Comentarios*, however, Cabeza de Vaca attempts to show this hanging as an example of his teaching principles of "justice" to the indigenous: "a los indios naturales les fué dicho y dado a entender las razones y causas justas que para ello había habido" [the reasons and just causes that existed (for the execution) were told and made clear to the native Indians] (242). I emphasize here that neither Aracaré's voice or perspective, nor that of his peoples in the aftermath of his murder is represented in the text, even as a translation or transcription. Yet his "crime," not Cabeza de Vaca's, was sufficient to justify war and capital punishment in the enactment

of “ideal” empire.

Cabeza de Vaca could not keep up with weaving so many threads of contradictory ideals into the same narrative, made nearly impossible by external pressures of law, as well as by the realities of hunger and epidemic illness in Río de la Plata. Towards the end of Cabeza de Vaca’s governorship, when the Spaniards were starving at the port of Los Reyes, the governor ordered his Captain, Gonzalo de Mendoza to go to a local tribe, the Arianicosies, and bring them under the *Requerimiento*: “hacer lo que vos [...] habeis de hacer en los pueblos donde vais a buscar bastimentos para sustentar esta gente por que no se muera de hambre” [to do what you have to do in the villages where you have to search for provisions, in order that our people may not die from starvation] (314). Here, Cabeza de Vaca attempted to show himself to be a charitable and a formidable governor, but given his circumstances, he could not do this while simultaneously respecting the language of law, nor the “buenos tratamientos” of the Arianicosies. If the normal demands of the *Requerimiento* failed to obtain provisions, then Mendoza could do what was necessary: “si todavía no os lo quisieren dar, tomarlo heis por fuerza; y si os lo defendieren con mano armada, hacerles heis la Guerra, porque la hambre en que quedamos no sufre otra cosa” [should they then refuse to give it, you shall take it by force, and, if resistance be offered you, shall make war upon them, for the hunger we suffer from justifies us in resorting to these extreme measures] (314).

The “model” or “ideal” mode of imperial governance Cabeza de Vaca proposed in a conciliatory mode in his proem did not function with the indigenous population, nor with the colonists, in Río de la Plata. The language of Spanish law was riddled with contradictions during the 1540s, a time of great debate and reorientation of imperial policy. In part because of the impossible nature of these legal demands, and in part because of his crimes, Cabeza de Vaca could not refer to

actual events in order to portray his life as an inscription of imperial exemplarity, and his character as *christiano, sabio, justiciero, fuerte, verdadero, prudente, liberal, magnánimo, clemente, humano, manso, benigno y amable y aborrescedor de todo lo contrario*, as he prescribed to the Prince Don Carlos in the preface. Referential, rather than a rhetorically constructed, history, grounded in the language of law, would not suffice his purposes. As such, he had to employ other strategies in order to achieve “vindication” and restore, on a textual level, his identity as *adelantado*.

*“Aquí está un gobernador”: Reading Cabeza de Vaca’s Unwritable Life*

As a result of the suppressed autobiographical discourse in the *Comentarios* as well as Cabeza de Vaca’s self-imposed task of writing Spain’s future “biography,” the gap between the Cabeza de Vaca’s contested experience as governor and his ideal construction of that governorship erupts on a symbolic level. The use of tropes to fashion the self was common in the Renaissance, as is well known (Greenblatt 1983); they could also serve to fashion the nation, or the relationship between self and nation. As José Rabasa states, Cabeza de Vaca is a “critic-ethnographer who reiterates on a symbolic level the mythology that structures and articulates [...] violence” —the violence of hunger, hardship, colonial conquest, and a struggle for power in Río de la Plata (2000: 43). We may then ask how the symbolic documents embedded in Cabeza de Vaca’s “ideal” self-employment also allows him to sign the *Comentarios* with his legally revoked title of *adelantado y gobernador de la provincia de Río de la Plata* (Fig. 1). As I proposed earlier, these documents, the contents of which the reader does not have access to, allow Cabeza de Vaca to claim his vindication as historical and authentic by satisfying the demands of the law on the level of form, rather than content, thereby avoiding refutable argument. The bureaucratic Spanish State gave

great importance to legal documents, and, as Roberto González Echevarría has established, they were in themselves a model, and a constraint, on historiographical writing: “Narrative, both fictional and historical, thus issued from the forms and constraints of legal writing [which] was the predominant form of discourse in the Spanish Golden Age” (45).

It is important to underscore that the *Comentarios* does not solely operate on a literal register, despite its generally documentary style, but that symbolism is also prevalent. In fact, the *Comentarios* is as figurative as the *Naufragios*, exemplified by numerous episodes, including the anecdote of a miraculous *grillo* [cricket] in Chapter 2, which alerts the crew to landfall, and helps them to avoid a shipwreck (Maura 2008: 163). This early episode is later linked to Cabeza de Vaca’s parallel return to Spain in *grillos* [shackles] in the final chapter, 84, creating a circular narrative structure for the *Comentarios*. The events that transpire on the governor’s return to Spain are some of the most fantastic in all of Cabeza de Vaca’s *oeuvre*. In *grillos*, after having been imprisoned for eleven months in Río de la Plata, the deposed governor was transported back to Spain for trial on a specially outfitted brigantine. The *Comentarios* relates that Domingo de Irala’s officials, Alonso Cabrera and Garci-Venegas, tried to poison Cabeza de Vaca three times with arsenic and sulfur during the journey, but he survived by using an antidote made of “unicorn horn,” a mythical antidote proper to medieval travel narrative. Unicorn horn appears here as the marker of an epic hero who is able to defy death through the invocation of magic. Cabeza de Vaca’s improbable survival was indicative of God’s favor, and thus God’s wrath fell upon his captors, when their brigantine nearly sank because of incessant storms and they lost almost all their provisions. Repentant, Cabrera and Garci-Venegas attributed the battering storms to divine retribution, and released Cabeza de Vaca once they were well underway and away from Domingo de Irala. At that precise moment, the storms ended: “Acabado de

soltarle, cesó el agua y viento y tormenta” [as soon as they let him go, the rain, wind, and storm stopped] (357).

Cabeza de Vaca’s innocence is portrayed dramatically through these acts of Providence, which in itself is not unusual for this time period or even for Spanish historiography. Yet the pace at which these providential symbolic events are introduced and narrated is very rapid compared to the rest of the history, which often seems “real-time,” full of scrupulous details that track the governor’s actions on practically a day-to-day basis. Even as the chapter attempts to show Cabeza de Vaca’s vindication to be as inevitable as the existence of the Spanish Empire, its artifices are patent. The narrative continues along its fantastic trajectory as it relates the remainder of Cabeza de Vaca’s journey back to Spain. Alonso Cabrera and Garci-Vanegas, deemed “alzados” [rebels] who are “aleves contra su rey” [risen against their king] would not stop in any sovereign territory in the Americas (except Río de la Plata, which was far from a law-abiding territory at the time) to seek provisions because of fear of being apprehended as outlaws. In the Azores, the Portuguese refuse to accept Cabeza de Vaca as prisoner, allegedly citing the illegitimacy of his arrest. The ship then sails on to Spain, where Garci-Venegas dies suddenly –his eyes explode– and Alonso Cabrera loses his mind and kills his wife. The friars involved in Cabeza de Vaca’s arrest die suddenly as well, “que parece manifestarse la poca culpa que el gobernador ha tenido” [which seems to demonstrate that the governor was barely guilty] (358). Even though everyone dies in a ruthless sweep of allegedly rebellious lives, Cabeza de Vaca remains a prisoner at court for eight years. He omits to mention the reasons for his incarceration, or even the lack of justification for it. Instead, he skips ahead to the results of his appeals, also leaving out his initial conviction in 1551. In the final paragraph of the *Comentarios*, he writes in the third person:

Y después de le haber tenido preso y detenido en la corte ocho años, le dieron por libre y quito; y por algunas causas que le movieron, le quitaron la



gobernación, porque sus contrarios decían que si volvía a la tierra, que por castigar a los culpados habría escándalos y alteraciones en la tierra; y así, se la quitaron, con todo lo demás, sin haberle dado recompensa de lo mucho que gastó en el servicio que hizo en la ir a socorrer y descubrir.

[And after having made him prisoner and detained him at court for eight years, they set him free and clear of charges; and for some reasons that moved them, they took away his governorship, because his opponents said that if he went back [to Río de la Plata], that because of the punishment of the guilty there would be scandals and uprisings there; and so, they took it away from him, with everything else, without having given him any compensation for everything he spent in his service, going there to rescue the people and make further discoveries] (359).

Such “causas” [reasons] for his removal from office, which are not elaborated, are perhaps the most difficult aspect of his life story for Cabeza de Vaca to manage, because their discussion probably would have disrupted his attempt to assert his innocence. Yet these concluding remarks of the text are not only insufficient as explanation or vindication, but they are also abrupt and incomplete. It seems to be taken for granted that the reader will accept Cabeza de Vaca’s account of the greedy, corrupt uprising against him, making it unnecessary to dwell on eight years of proceedings and the harsh sentence served him in 1551. The memoir gives an uneven treatment to the central controversy regarding Cabeza de Vaca’s innocence.

Let us turn now to examine the textual strategy which Cabeza de Vaca deploys in order to solve the conundrum of attempting to represent a criminal past using the discourse and style of legal writing, and restore his legally-revoked title of *adelantado*. If Cabeza de Vaca asserted his own version of sovereignty against official policies in Río de la Plata, then his attempt to be “vindicated” in the present, while constructing his past self as the perfect embodiment of the 1542 New Laws, would most probably betray itself at some level. By deploying irrefutable documents in this manner, his “true” life history, outside the bounds of the law, may still have a kind of textual existence.

The brigantine that bore the governor in *grillos* back to Spain—a brigantine bearing signs and symbols of providence and celestial vengeance—also bore a scroll of secret documents placed there by Cabeza de Vaca himself. A light ship, the brigantine was only meant for exploration along the rivers and littoral region in Río de la Plata, and not fit for a voyage to Spain. In order to remove the governor from the colony because of the partisan divisions resulting from his imprisonment, Domingo de Irala outfitted this particular brigantine for transatlantic voyage. The governor had been in prison for so long that his followers, who continued to take his side despite Irala’s terror campaigns, feared that his captors had “secretly murdered him” (255). At the same time, Irala and his officers wrote a series of *memoriales* to Charles V regarding Cabeza de Vaca’s arrest, which the *Comentarios* claims contained false information. For all practical purposes, however, these memos were the “official” account of what happened in the colony; penned by royal officials, they would be treated as legal documents in a court of law.

The *Comentarios* relates that, to counter these *memoriales*, the governor buried the “true” version of events into the body of the ship:

y al tiempo que se adobaba y fornecía el bergantín en que le habían de traer, los carpinteros y amigos hicieron con ellos que con todo el secreto del mundo cavasen un madero tan grueso como el muslo, que tenía tres palmos, y en este grueso le metieron un proceso de una información general que el gobernador había hecho para enviar a Su Majestad, y otras escrituras que sus amigos habían escapado cuando le prendieron, que le importaban; y así, las tomaron y envolvieron en un encerado, y le enclavaron el madero en[...]el bergantín con seis clavos en la cabeza y pie, y decían los carpinteros que habían puesto aquello allí para fortificar el bergantín, y venía tan secreto, que todo el mundo no lo podía alcanzar a saber.

[While the brigantine was being cleaned and equipped for her voyage, the friends of the governor arranged with the carpenters to hollow a timber as big as a man’s thigh, and three spans long, and place inside it a general act of accusation which the governor had addressed to His Majesty, and other important papers collected by his friends when he was arrested. This packet

was taken and enveloped in a waked cloth, and the piece of timber was fastened to the (...) brigantine with six nails at the head and six at the feet. The carpenters said they had placed it there to strengthen the brigantine, and the secret was kept so well that nobody was able to discover it] (352).

The contents of these papers are unknown and unexplained; they may have been testimonies Cabeza de Vaca intended to use in his defense. Yet within the text they remain a secret “kept so well” that their function as the ‘true’ history, in effect, demands that their contents be kept undisclosed. A possible explanation for this secrecy is that, for Cabeza de Vaca to explicate a counterhistory, other than the one that represents the ideal of humble service to His Majesty, would be to enter into argument, where as the *Comentarios* actively avoids argument, since it had already failed to vindicate Cabeza de Vaca after years of court proceedings. This undercover history resists articulation—that is, it doesn’t want to put forth specific details-- but insists anyway on the significance of the written documents’ existence. In this way, Cabeza de Vaca is able to assert the validity of his governorship without revealing any particulars which may have impugned his case for innocence or made him reveal the reality of his practice of sovereignty, considered illegitimate by the Spanish Crown and Council of the Indies, in Río de la Plata.

This history within a history is literally hollowed into the vessel transporting the governor back to Spain. Interestingly, the secret compartment’s dimensions resemble that of the human body: the compartment is as big as a thigh, and it is nailed at its “head” and “foot” to the ship. This imagery suggests that for Cabeza de Vaca, historiography goes beyond mere legal reporting, and that the true version of events—or at least its container—requires figurative language to achieve a satisfactory rendering. The ship itself is implicitly a reference to metaphor, from the Greek “*meta*” and “*pherein*,” which together mean to carry or bear across. Burying the true story within the “body” of the ship seems to carry the meaning across from the Americas to Spain. Cabeza de Vaca’s succeeding story, like his *Naufraios*, is all that is left when

someone loses power, title, influence, and nearly loses one's life. In the closing lines of his preface to the *Naufraños*, he famously writes that he hopes Charles V will receive the text in "nombre del servicio, pues éste solo es el que un hombre que salió desnudo pudo sacar consigo" [the name of service, as this text is the only thing that a man who left naked could take with him]. This conclusion implies as well that *only* Cabeza de Vaca could present this narrative, which, unlike a coffer full of riches, he could not actually "take" from the Americas. It is instead a symbolic treasure taken from his own experiences in America, from his own body, stripped of the trappings of society. In both the *Naufraños* and the *Comentarios*, then, the self is inextricable not only from the constitution of the text but also from Cabeza de Vaca's service to the Emperor. Nevertheless, in the *Comentarios*, the fact that reader never learns of the contents of this "true" history borne to Spain by the body of the ship speaks to the refusal of Cabeza de Vaca to resign his attachment to his lost governorship.

*"Aquí está una carta": Domingo de Irala's Letter*

The "thigh" of Cabeza de Vaca's prison ship bears only one of the suppressed documents in the *Comentarios*. The first appears much earlier in the text, in Chapter 37. In between the hanging of Aracaré and the burning of Asunción at the hand of a Guaraní woman, the expedition of the colonists who had remained at Santa Catarina in 1541 returned to Asunción via Buenos Aires, along the Paraná River. One of Cabeza de Vaca's main complaints against the previous, abusive rule of Domingo de Irala was his depopulation of Buenos Aires and his relocation of the settlement to Asunción. The colonists remaining there had to be rescued and Cabeza de Vaca put together an expedition to accomplish this, led by his nephew Pedro de Estopiñán Cabeza de Vaca. Upon the expedition's return to Asunción, Cabeza de Vaca's nephew reported that he

found a letter in Buenos Aires, of some interest to the governor:

en la entrada del Puerto, junto donde estaba asentado el pueblo, halló un mastel enarbolado hincado en tierra, con unas letras cavadas que decían: «Aquí está una carta»; y fué hallada en unos barrenos que se dieron; la cual abierta, estaba firmada de Alonso Cabrera [...] y de Domingo de Irala, vizcaíno, que se decía y nombraba teniente de gobernador de la provincia; y decía dentro de ella cómo habían despoblado el pueblo del Puerto de Buenos Aires y llevado la gente que en él residía a la ciudad de la Ascensión por causas que en la carta se contenían.

[at the entrance of that port, near the settlement, [Gonzalo de Ribera] found a ship's mast planted in the earth, with an inscription carved on it as follows: "Here is a letter." Upon searching, this letter was found in a hole bored in the mast. It was opened and found to be signed by Alonso Cabrera (...) and by Domingo de Irala, Biscayan, who had named himself lieutenant governor of the province; and inside it said how they had depopulated the settlement of the port of Buenos Aires and taken the people living there to the city of Asunción for reasons that were explained in the letter] (242).

Cabeza de Vaca's political rivals, responsible for his later imprisonment, place the story of the abandonment of Buenos Aires in an abandoned ship's mast. Yet Cabrera and Irala meant to announce its presence; the letter is not meant to remain a secret from the perspective of its writers. Rather, it is kept hidden by Cabeza de Vaca: the "reasons [...] explained in the letter" are not elaborated. Other letters in the *Comentarios*, such as Gonzalo de Mendoza's in Chapter 40, have their contents printed in detail, suggesting that the earlier "reasons" were purposefully suppressed. Hence, Domingo de Irala's own history of the depopulation of Buenos Aires remains untold within the *Comentarios*, even though it was one of Cabeza de Vaca's primary complaints against his political enemy. Would the content, if revealed, censure Cabeza de Vaca's version of events? Significantly, the carved phrase "Aquí está una carta," beyond mere announcement, serves to indicate a textual absence within the *Comentarios*. We may wonder whether the refusal to publish the contents of the letter make this statement a performative gesture that only points to the inability to tell the true history of Río de la Plata, its burial in grounded and swamped ships, symbolic of the battered pursuit of worldwide empire.

Yet to the reader of this chapter, the chaos and disorder that Pedro de Estopiñán Cabeza de Vaca found at the abandoned settlement seems to dramatize the possible contents of that hidden letter. This occurs because of the passage's grammatical ambiguity. The final sentence of the paragraph quoted above is joined to the next clause by a semi-colon and uses a past pluperfect tense, the subject of which is not clear at first. He states that “de causa de hallar el pueblo alzado y levantado, había estado muy cerca de ser perdida toda la gente que en la nao venía” [because of finding the town rebellious and in an uprising, all the people who came in the ship had come very close to being lost] (263). This “confusion” serves to support the need for good government and signals Cabeza de Vaca's instrumental role in the rescue of the Spanish displaced from the port city. At first it is not clear if the scene of chaos is transcribed from the letter itself or from Pedro de Estopiñán's report to the governor regarding what he encountered in Buenos Aires, confusing past and present. Ultimately, the reasons expounded in Irala's “buried” letter are not revealed—only the precarious, present consequences suffered by Cabeza de Vaca's nephew and the colonists in Buenos Aires.

By drawing the reader's attention to a letter which chronicled the history of the place in which it was found, yet not revealing its contents, and then confusing past and present, the *Comentarios* not only create suspense and mystery; they also effectively indict Domingo de Irala without argument and without evidence. As Maura notes, this technique of “dejo de contar” [I won't tell any more] serves to ignite the curiosity and imagination of the reader (177). But it is also a commentary on the writing of the *Comentarios* itself, within the context of Cabeza de Vaca's afflictions. By eliding the details of the letter, Cabeza de Vaca invalidates Irala's motives *and*, simultaneously, refuses to acknowledge his own loss of the governorship, without entering into legal argument. Yet in reality, at the time of the writing of the

*Comentarios*, Domingo de Irala was the officially appointed governor of Río de la Plata. Although Cabeza de Vaca improperly used that title on the frontispiece of his text, it was a title that was lost to him forever, if ever it legitimately belonged to him. In effect, his text is saying in reference to himself: “Aquí está un gobernador” [Here is a governor]. By burying the “true” story, Cabeza de Vaca denied loss in the name of history, and in the name of his life; his *Comentarios* should stand in for the content of Irala and Cabrera’s letter.

*Embodied History: Cabeza de Vaca’s Spy*

Perhaps the most intriguing and interconnective “unwritable” history is one that is embedded in Chapter 77 and more directly “embodied” by a Guaraní Indian woman (*india*) during the imprisonment of the governor in Asunción. For eleven months, Irala and his followers isolated Cabeza de Vaca in a dank windowless chamber. Only a naked Guaraní woman was allowed to tend to him every night at dinnertime. She also served as his spy, enhancing her potential for symbolic value as a go-between in the *Comentarios*. She managed to bring the governor letters every third night from his “aliados y confederados” [allies and confederates], curled in a thin document—documents whose contents we never learn, except that they refer to the events going on outside the prison. During eleven months, the Guaraní woman also smuggled a kind of powdered ink so that she could take messages from the governor to his allies outside the prison: “Traía ella esta carta, que era medio pliego de papel delgado, muy arrollada sotilmente, y cubierta con un poco de cera negra, metida en lo hueco de los dedos del pie” [She brought this letter, which consisted of a half a sheet of thin paper, rolled really thin, and covered with a bit of black wax, secured in the hollow under her toes] (341). These secret letters are thus undetectable, buried in her

body, and suggest an indissoluble link between the woman and the documents, into which we must inquire.

That these micro-histories of the rebellion and imprisonment of the governor, a topic relatively neglected by the *Comentarios*, are conveyed by a nameless Indian woman is very significant when we consider the historical context of the Guaraní women and their representation in both the legal *relaciones* and the historiographical *Comentarios*. These women occupy an important space in Cabeza de Vaca's life history, in between savagery, betrayal, and desire, and outside European law and sovereignty, indicating their potential symbolic representation of the colony itself in a European text. From the Spaniards' perspective, the Guaraní women played a crucial role in the settling and the government of Río de la Plata. The historical reliance of the Spanish colonists on the Guaraní women of Río de la Plata is well-documented but deeply problematic in terms of a balanced analysis, as we have few records of the women's subjective experience<sup>89</sup>. As Barbara Ganson explains,

the violence and abuse of the Guaraní was not unique in the New World [...] What was rare in the upper region of the Río de la Plata was the heavy reliance of the Spanish on female Indian labor. To survive in this new environment, Spaniards sought Guaraní women not only for sexual favors as their wives and concubines, but also because they were skilled at agriculture and could provide them with sustenance (28).

The centrality of the Guaraní women to colonial affairs, and thus, to imperial sovereignty, is reflected in the *Comentarios* both on literal and figurative registers. These women, like in Jan Van der Straet and Theodore DeBry's engraving of a voluptuous, reclining, and awakening "America" (Fig. 2), occupy a metaphorical and symbolic space in this text, based on their important economic and sexual roles in the development of the Spanish colony in Río de la Plata. Even the word that referred to

---

<sup>89</sup> See Juan de Maura *Españolas del ultramar*, and José Torre Revello, *Esclavas blancas en las indias occidentales* for more information on the experiences of Spanish women in the colonies. There are, unfortunately, fewer records and studies of the experiences of the Guaraní from their perspectives.



the territories “discovered” by Columbus, *las Indias*<sup>90</sup> [The Indies], suggests the metonymic displacement of this term to embrace the female inhabitants of the Indies. Yet their subjectivities have not been recorded, or have been erased or buried in the margins of history; although difficult to interpret, their instrumentality and power in Spanish colonial affairs and sovereignty was certain.

*“Ansi se usa dellas, como en esos reynos la moneda”: Cabeza de Vaca’s Compensation*

The Guaraní people served a vital economic role in the Spanish colonization of the Río de la Plata region; the women, in particular, were violently reduced to currency in these alliances and transactions. It took the Spaniards some 20 years after “discovering” the Río de la Plata region to make any headway through Guaraní territory. Once they did form alliances, however, the main ‘currency’ binding the two groups were the Guaraní women, who, in exchange for material goods and status, were the main agricultural producers for the Spanish (25). As Juan Carlos Garavaglia states,

The local people handed over women as a sign of recognition of the alliance (as they had among themselves) and in exchange received Spanish gifts – mainly iron hatchets and fish hooks, extremely valuable tools in that setting. Some individuals came to possess more than seventy women, and the average number, so we read, was ten women per Spanish man. Women in fact constituted an accumulation of labor power. First, the woman worked for the Europeans –as they had for their Indian husbands, or so Spaniards reported– weaving, carrying burdens, or tilling the soil. In addition women also gave Spaniards access to the labor of their male relatives, as women’s father and brother were traditionally obligated to ‘help’ their sons-in-law and brothers-in-law. The Spanish claimed these women as theirs to profit by, as well as for sexual relations (7).

This was considered a kinship relationship, from the Guaraní perspective, but not from

---

<sup>90</sup> As is well known, Columbus called the islands of the Caribbean “Las Indias” because he believed they were part of India. From this first error came the misnomer of “indio” [Indian] applied by the Spanish to the Native Americans. However, because in Spanish the noun “indio” reflects gender, the female Indians’ name (or misnomer) will coincide with the Spanish term for the entire region, *las indias*.

a Spanish vision, indicative of the considerable problems of translation of cultural concepts in imperial interactions. In fact, all these terms the *Comentarios* uses so naturally—sovereignty, governor, currency, among others—belong to the European system of law and government, not that of the Guaraní (Cheyfitz 43). Conquistadors took themselves to be more like feudal lords looking for wealth and leisure than to kin members, rather than individuals, of the Guaraní tribe. The initial ‘peaceful’ association quickly deteriorated into a series of indigenous uprisings, beginning in 1537 and peaking after 1542, largely due to a violation of these kinship terms on the part of the Spanish. The Guaraní felt the Spanish were treating them as slaves, and, since gender roles<sup>91</sup> were very clearly divided in Guaraní culture, the men felt as though they were being treated like women, which was unacceptable to them (26).

Additionally, as the De Bry engraving (Fig. 2) iconically reflects, the value of the “wilderness” in Río de la Plata was often expressed in feminine terms in the sixteenth-century European imaginary, in tropes of marvel and abundance. In the *Comentarios*, however, the feminized wilderness is always accompanied by the presence of a governing order, as if to suggest one cannot exist without the other—that one enables the other. Early in the establishment of alliances, Cabeza de Vaca counted the presence of the Guaraní women in greeting him along the way as a “señal de gran confianza que de ellos tenían” [sign of the great trust (the natives) had in (the

---

<sup>91</sup> We will recall that Cabeza de Vaca’s own life was marked by an unusual relationship to gender and sexuality, as recording in his own writing as well as in other legal documentation from his youth. Robert T.C Goodwin and Juan Maura relate his duties until 1527 as a household attendant (“camarero”) to Alonso de Guzmán, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, a very powerful aristocrat in Spain whose marriage had been nullified in part due to his sexual impotence. Part of Cabeza de Vaca’s duties included smuggling appealing and willing women into the married Duke’s bedchamber, after which he would listen through the door to the tryst. Despite the women’s best efforts, they could not arouse the Duke and declared “no es para nada” [it’s of no use] (Maura 1998: 22). However, it was also documented that the young Cabeza de Vaca was able to “arouse” the otherwise impotent and effeminate (likely homosexual) Duke, who claimed to be a woman just like those Cabeza de Vaca helped smuggle into his bedchamber. This, along with Cabeza de Vaca’s unconventional experiences among North American Native Americans, as chronicled in his *Naufragios*, suggests that any declaration made by the governor that invokes gender and sexuality should be considered psychologically complex and ideologically charged.

Spaniards)] (187).



Figure 2: “America” by Theodore de Bry after Jan van der Straet (1580)

Although the Guaraní were a patrilineal people, it seems the women possessed considerable political authority in practice, perhaps influenced by the matrilineal structure of the society. Further, the women were to be feared for their seductive powers. In Chapter 16, Cabeza de Vaca narrates an enhanced account of Guaraní anthropophagic ritual, fixating especially on the sexual behavior of the women towards the prisoners being “fattened” for the feast: “luego que lo captivan lo ponen a engordar y le dan todo cuanto quiere a comer, y a sus mismas mujeres y hijas para que haya con ellas sus placeres” [after they capture [the enemy] they fatten him up and give him as much as he wants to eat, and give him their own wives and daughters so he can have his way with them] (195).

From the beginning of his own *relación*, Cabeza de Vaca signals the Guaraní women as both agents and evidence of corruption among the Spaniards, which included the injustices done to the indigenous population. Yet, as above, Cabeza de Vaca also notes the power of these women. In one tribe, the women took it upon

themselves to free any prisoners of war, and “es cierto que las mujeres tienen más libertad que la que dio la reina doña Isabel, nuestra señora, a las mujeres de España” [it’s certain that the women have more freedom than the Spanish women were given by Queen Isabella, our lady] (219). Far from obedient or subservient, these women had authority of their own, something remarkable to the Spaniards and even threatening. The myth of the Amazons also found fertile ground in Río de la Plata and is touched on by Cabeza de Vaca and by the perhaps apocryphal letter from Hernando de Ribera appended to the *Comentarios* (Maura 2008: 68).

Yet in the *relaciones* and in the *Comentarios*, the troubled position of the Guaraní women is all too clear, both in the actions attributed to them and the violence done to them by the Spaniards. Instead of free and powerful, they were most often reduced to the status of animals, slaves, or things. According to Cabeza de Vaca, Domingo de Irala and his supporters structured their sovereignty in the allegedly unlawful colony around greed and desire for these women. In the words of Cabeza de Vaca in his *relación*:

Estos cristianos españoles que hallé en esta provincia, y especialmente algunos de los capitanes y oficiales de Su Magestad e sus amigos, hacían grandes agravios e crueldades en los naturales y en sus mujeres e hijos [...] y demás desto se mataban uno a otros sobre los celos de las dichas indias [...] tenían aceso carnal con madre y hija, dos hermanas, tías y sobrinas y otras parientas, y las indias libres cristianas vendían, trocaban, y cambiaban unos con otros como si fueran esclavas, y especialmente el dicho Domingo de Irala lo hizo [...]; estaban amancebados cada uno con treinta y quarenta y cinquenta mujeres.

[These Christian Spaniards that I came to find in this province, and especially some of the captains and officials of His Majesty and his friends, mistreated the natives and their women and children with great cruelty (...) and beyond this they killed each other over jealousy about these Indian women (...), they had carnal relations with mother and daughter, two sisters, aunts and nieces and other relatives, and the free, Christian Indian women were sold, traded and exchanged between them as if they were slaves, and especially the aforementioned Domingo de Irala did this [...] Each of [the Spaniards] lived together with thirty, forty, and fifty women ](28-29).

Indian women in Cabeza de Vaca's text emerge most often in relation to representations of cruelty and power, at the limits of the human—commodities and pawns in criminal games of desire and greed—and yet, they remained the most intimate connection between the Spaniards and the developing colony. Nonetheless, even after the drama of Cabeza de Vaca's governorship had passed, in 1556, Guaraní women were still seen as mere "currency" to facilitate empire: "A sucedido vender Yndias libres naturales desta tierra por caballos, perros y otras cosas, y ansi se usa dellas, como en esos reynos la moneda" [It has happened that they sell indigenous women for horses, dogs and other things, and so they use them as money is used in those kingdoms] (letter from Martín González to the Emperor, 1556, quoted in Rabasa 74). One cannot imagine a more heinous reduction of these women, to be used as the equivalents of horses, dogs and "things," of no more value than a coin: a means of *supplementing* expense and facilitating imperial expansion—for profit.

These Indian women, such as Cabeza de Vaca's helper and spy, represented the danger of the Spanish colonial dependency on the Guaraní and other Native American populations, as well as the fragile relationships between the Spaniards, who were quite willing to kill one another over these women and all they symbolized and offered. Towards the end of 1543, popular sentiment began its more steady turn against Cabeza de Vaca, attributed by the *Comentarios* to the governor's refusal to take some 100 Indian women back to Asunción that had been given to the officers by the local tribes "para estar bien con ellos y para que hiciesen de ellas lo que solían de las otras que tenían" [to be on good terms with them and so they would do with them as they usually did with the others they had]. The Guaraní women, then, were abused in the Spanish struggle for power in Río de la Plata, and characterized as a commodity or possession.

When Cabeza de Vaca was imprisoned, all of his Indian women were taken

from him and distributed among his rivals. In his *relación* he states:

Otro sy, todas las yndias que los naturales me abian dado de su boluntad para que me sirbiesen, los dichos oficiales y Domingo de Yrala las tomaron todas y las repartieron entre sy y los bizcainos y cordobeses<sup>92</sup> sus amigos, y después de mi prisión hicieron grandes crueldades en las yndias naturales de la tierra, dandoles tantos açotes que las dexaban por muertas, y á palos las mataban

[What's more, all of the female indians that the natives had willingly given me as servants were taken and distributed by Domingo de Irala and the said officials, and their friends, the Biscayans and Cordobans, and after I was imprisoned, they committed acts of cruelty towards the native women of that land, whipping them and leaving them for dead, and beating them to death] (67).

The women are an index of Spanish brutality, occupying a harrowing space between rape, possession, and murder. The *Comentarios* call attention to the assault and abuse that Cabeza de Vaca's spy endures from his prison guards to ensure she isn't smuggling anything to the governor: they strip her naked, examine her mouth, and even cut off her hair. Worse, they sexually violate her to ensure she is not aiding the governor: "catándola todo lo posible, que por ser cosa vergonzosa, no lo señalo" [searching her in parts which modesty compels me not to mention] (341). But such is her loyalty to the governor that she evades these measures, and despite attempts by Cabeza de Vaca's enemies to seduce her and make her divulge her secret, she remains loyal and silent:

Los oficiales y sus consortes lo sopecharon o fueron avisados que el gobernador sabía lo que fuera pasaba y ellos hacía; y para saber y asegurarse ellos de esto, buscaron cuatro mancebos de entre ellos para que se envolviesen con la india, en lo cual no tuvieron mucho que hacer, porque de costumbre no son escasas de sus personas, y tiene por gran afrenta negallo a nadie que se lo pida, y dicen que ¿para qué se lo dieron sino para aquello?; y envueltos con ella y dándole muchas cosas, no pudieron saber ningún secreto de ella, durando el trato y conversación de once meses.

[The officers and their friends suspected her, for they had learned that the governor knew what was happening outside the prison and what they were doing. In order to be sure of this, they chose four of the more youthful of their party to seduce the Indian woman—not a difficult task, for these women are not sparing of their charms, and consider it an affront to deny their favors

---

<sup>92</sup> At this time, there were violent conflicts between Spaniards coming from different parts of Spain, in part accounting for the importance of these labels, such as "Biscayan."

to anyone who asks; what's more, they ask that why do they have such charms if not for that purpose? These four youths, accordingly, got (sexually) involved with her and gave her many presents; but they could never make her divulge her secret during the whole of their involvement, which lasted eleven months].

Her secrecy, as well as the secret documents she harbors particularly stand out in this passage. On a symbolic level for the Europeans, per their rudimentary ethnographic understanding of the Guaraní, an Indian woman performing her tradition role in Guaraní society (as was Cabeza de Vaca's spy) nonetheless represents the capacity to betray – to fatten her prisoner for the kill. She also embodies the desire and desirability that led to alliances and divisions in colonial government between the Spaniards and the Guaraní, but also among the different factions of Spaniards. Within the *Comentarios*, Indian women are both victims and agents of unlawful behavior; at some level, they point to Cabeza de Vaca's compromised position, and to his lack of compensation.

Here, the nameless indigenous woman's apparent willingness to transgress, as well as to risk and receive abuse, is shown to be all for the sake of the governor. The text later equates the abuse of her sexuality to Irala's consent to the raiding of the province, for Christians to take indigenous women as booty and goods without payment, and for waging war recklessly while Cabeza de Vaca was imprisoned. According to Cabeza de Vaca, this was Irala's concept of liberty for his people: giving them license to do as they would, while "officially" denying such permission was ever given. According to Paraguayan historian Enrique de Gandía (127), the "extraordinary abundance" of women elevated Río de la Plata, in the Spanish imagination, to the level of paradise or utopia. For Cabeza de Vaca, utopia was his perpetual governorship, which also permitted a perpetual ownership of Guaraní women. "Thus, the exemplary *adelantado* deftly reconciles an aesthetic of colonial desire, while condemning Irala with strategically placed formulaic repetitions of legal

terms drawn from the Ordenanzas [of 1526, for the good treatment of the Indians],” writes José Rabasa in reference to the representation of Indian women in the *Comentarios*. Yet Cabeza de Vaca also manages to symbolically strip Irala of his power and reconstitute himself in another way: through a refusal to tell, to keep certain events forever silent.

Cabeza de Vaca’s devoted indigenous woman is an embodiment of a silenced history, a go-between who is already internally divided, while also represented as empty. She is both a written history and a blank page willing to carry the governor’s message to his allies. Although the governor’s enemies seduce her in order to know what she is hiding, she doesn’t reveal the content of her messages. Able to keep something from them and from us, she effectively *becomes* the text’s secret. The significant suppressed content is symbolized by the Indian woman’s refusal to tell. Her secrecy—like Cabeza de Vaca’s—is one of the only manifestations of her self-sovereignty and subjectivity that remains legible in this Eurocentric text. Yet, we must be careful not to go too far. In the *Comentarios*, her loyalty to the governor isn’t really about her: she mostly serves to emphasize Cabeza de Vaca’s construction of himself as the charismatic *adelantado* of Río de la Plata. His wistful portrayal of his spy is a gesture of the powerful governor who could animate a violently emptied signifier, even after removed from the power he so desired. This, perhaps, is his best or only compensation for his “expense” in the conquest and pacification of Río de la Plata, through which he may virtually purchase his title as *adelantado* once again.

#### *Etching and Erasing the Annals: Concluding Thoughts*

A case of colonial graffiti scrawled along the edges of this autobiography-as-history, both written and erased, at some level summarizes the crux of the



*Comentarios*. When the inscriptions stating “Por tu rey y por tu ley morirás” [For your king and your loyalty (law) you will give your life] were found scratched into the walls of the city during Cabeza de Vaca’s imprisonment, Irala and his officers “hacían informaciones para saber quién lo había escrito” [took steps to find out who were the authors] and they arrested and tortured various people to discover the ‘author’ of this loyalist phrase. Pedro Hernández’s *relación* rather explicitly attributes the inscription to “Un Gregorio de Acosta, portugues”:

en la pared de su casa hizo unas letras cavadas con un cuchillo, que decian: *por tu ley y por tu rrey e por tu casa moriras*; y pasando por allí Juan Xuarez e Lope d’Ugarte viscayno, e otros comuneros, las leyeron e hicieron gran pesquisa dicieron que [...] en un tiempo como aquel no se avian de escribir semejantes cosas [e que era] gran traydor vellaco el que las avia escripto e merecia castigo [...] lo fueron a decir a Domingo de Yrala e luego bolvieron e con un clavo desicieron las letras dandoles muchos rrasgos, de manera que no se pudieron mas leer.

[on the wall of his house he carved some words with a knife, which said, *for your loyalty and for your king and your home you will give your life*; and passing by there, Juan Xuarez and Lope d’Ugarte of Biscay, and other rebels, read them and undertook a big investigation saying that (...) in a time such as that such things shouldn’t be written and that whoever wrote them was a traitorous bastard and deserved punishment (...) they went to tell Domingo de Irala and later returned and with a nail erased the letters, scratching them out, so that they were then unreadable] (351).

The loyalist anthem – of course loathed by the ‘rebellious’ Irala– is erased and scratched out. Unlike the other documents I have analyzed, however, this phrase’s content is first revealed to the reader. The daring refrain, “Por tu ley y tu rrey e por tu casa morirás,” links law, the sovereign, and life and death in the colony of Río de la Plata. This graffiti is a mise-en-abyme of the text and exemplifies the context and challenges entailed in the writing of Cabeza de Vaca’s life as a memoir and proscription for future emperors. In demonstrating the act of writing and erasure around a phrase that summarizes the heart of the conflicts in this text, namely who was truly loyal to Charles V and the imperial project of Spain, Cabeza de Vaca is instructing us on how to read his history-- or, better yet, his autobiography and

memoir. In the *Comentarios*, history that wavers between disclosure and erasure serves to comment upon the complex, if not fully representable life (in a legal sense), of Cabeza de Vaca, *adelantado y gobernador de la provincia de Río de la Plata*, who analogously oscillates between power and imprisonment, life and death, inclusion and exclusion, sovereignty and crime, homogeneity and alterity. By elevating his *Comentarios* to a symbolic register, Cabeza de Vaca is able to comment on and memorialize his life, which had otherwise been erased, or forbidden. Within the economy of the *Comentarios*, he thus achieves a type of compensation for his considerable “expense.” For his law and his king—even if that king *was* Cabeza de Vaca himself and the law, his own—he died: he passed on from political power and was exiled into literary posterity, challenging the ways in which official history and lives of the sovereigns (and outlaws) could be written in the sixteenth-century Spanish Empire.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Prophet's Passport: Writing Re-formed Lives in Hans Staden's *True History*

*Woe to you, you poor free cities!  
What arrogance from you  
That without cause you raise your banner  
Against our pious monarch,  
The highest in the land.  
Truly, you should have considered  
How better to behave.  
Lord have mercy! The Spaniards are in our land.*<sup>93</sup>  
--*Historiche Volkslieder* 4, no. 539

*But that he, who has stood face to face with death, should be in the same state of mind  
as those, who view it from afar or who hear about it, is not to be expected, as  
everyone knows.*

--Hans Staden's Concluding Address, *True History*

The German adventurer Hans Staden's *True history and description of a country populated by a wild, naked and savage man-munching people* [Warhaftige Historia]<sup>94</sup> (1557, Marburg and Frankfurt) is both an autobiographical travel history and a captivity narrative, the outbound voyage of which demonstrates the interconnectedness of the German and Spanish-American enterprises in the sixteenth century. When Cabeza de Vaca's intended replacement as *adelantado* of Río de la Plata, Diego de Sanabrá, began his journey in a Spanish-administered, but German-owned, ship<sup>95</sup> across the Atlantic in 1549, Hans Staden (1525-1576) was also onboard, heading to South America for the second time in two years. Likely having fled his native Province of Hesse in 1547 after the defeat of the Protestant Princes in the Schmalkaldic War with Charles V and his Spanish Imperial troops, the mercenary

---

<sup>93</sup> Quoted and translated by Thomas A. Brady in "The Schmalkaldic War", *Protestant Politics* (1995: 292)

<sup>94</sup> I will refer to Staden's text by the shortened and translated title, *True History*.

<sup>95</sup> This ship was owned by the German banking family, the Welser (Domínguez xxiv).

gunner Staden spent over seven years total in Brazil. During the final nine months of his journey, he lived as a captive of the Tupinambá Amerindians, then as their “prophet” and kin-member, until his ransom and his return to Europe on a French ship in 1555. He arrived in Hesse in the same year as the signing of the Peace of Augsburg and just prior to Charles V’s abdication in 1556. There he submitted to a “confessional interrogation” (*Glaubensverhör*)<sup>96</sup> regarding his experience in Brazil by his Protestant Prince and patron, Landgrave Philip of Hesse (1504-1567), and Hesse’s professor, the famed anatomist and public dissector, Dr. Johannes Dryander (1500-1560).<sup>97</sup> This account, given under legal duress, served as the basis of Staden’s *True History*, which Dryander probably wrote down, prefaced, “corrected,” and “improved” for publication (Staden 10). As a sensational narrative featuring “cannibals” and offering an example of Protestant salvation in the aftermath of the monumental 1555 Peace, it was an immediate bestseller throughout Europe.<sup>98</sup>

The ethnographic accuracy of Staden’s *True History* contributes to its exceptionality and exemplarity as an early modern captivity narrative of European contact with the Tupinambá of Brazil. Yet one important feature distinguishing Staden’s account from the more famous *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (1578) by Jean de Léry, and *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* (1558) by Andre Thévet, as well as the travel accounts from Portuguese sources, is the author’s personal “intimacy” and eyewitness experience of the Tupinambá Amerindians in a

---

<sup>96</sup> See Luciana Villas Bôas (2006: 25).

<sup>97</sup> By the time he “corrected” and “improved” Staden’s *True History*, Dr. Dryander had already published several works in his capacity as professor of medicine at the University of Marburg, which had been founded in 1527 as a university for Protestant theologians. A noted anatomist, Dryander was famous for his public dissection of cadavers and for his well known anatomy, *Anatomiae, hoc est, corporis humani dissectionis pars prior* [...], in Marburg in 1537, also dedicated to Philip of Hesse.

<sup>98</sup> The first edition, in two printings, was published at Marburg in 1557 by Andreas Kolbe. The Frankfurt edition, published by Weigan Han, is considered to have been “pirated”. It also went through two printings. The first Dutch translation, at Antwerp, appeared in 1558. There were numerous Latin, German, and Dutch editions throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first English edition appeared in 1874, published by the Hakluyt society. See Whitehead 2008: xv-xvi.

variety of cultural roles, such as captive intended for sacrifice, a shaman, a healer, and a prophet. Life writing, then—in the form of an edited, testimonial autobiography—is at the core of this narrative’s importance, constituting its “irreducible element,” according to Neil Whitehead (2008: lvii).

The prominent role of “categories”<sup>99</sup> of communal identity—Portuguese, Castilian, Galician, French, German, Mameluke, among others— in mediating Staden’s autobiography has not been fully considered, however. These terms serve as an intersection of personal and collective identity and, in part, permitted the *True History* to engage with political discourse in the context of German conflicts with the Spanish Empire in the Reformation. The capacity for Staden’s history to function as political discourse representing the concerns of the Province of Hesse is nonetheless problematic. As I have shown in this dissertation, in the sixteenth century, the unofficial life history of an individual outside-the-law could serve as a counterexample to, and critique of, the sovereign’s official life history, which had implications for the broader narrative of the political body. Yet in this chapter I ask: what happens when the individual’s life history is controlled and deployed by the *sovereign* of a community, who, in turn, seeks to critique a superior political body? And how is this further complicated when the life history in question is a transatlantic, cross-cultural autobiography? I argue that Staden’s *True History*, while crafted by his Prince and editor to resonate with the narrative of Protestant triumph over imperial oppression, ultimately fails to be cathected to a unified political discourse. This can be observed through an examination of Staden’s transformation as improvised through categories of communal identity, which he ultimately shows to be contingent, as they are

---

<sup>99</sup> Even after the meaning of these categories was supposedly fixed, treating identity as a static model impedes understanding cultural interaction and encounter, as Eric R. Wolf has established: “The habit of treating named entities [...] as fixed entities opposed to one another by stable internal architecture and external boundaries interferes with our ability to understand their mutual encounter and confrontation” (7). Identity and place of origin were (and are) connected, but not fixed.

deformed through his interactions with the Tupinambá “cannibals.”<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the demands of truth accompanying the institutional and editorial frameworks surrounding Staden’s tale are rendered impossible by the structure of autobiography and travel narrative, both of which involve the displacement and distortion of Staden’s subjectivity, on a textual and psychological level, respectively. He thus shows himself to be a skilled improviser of multiple, simultaneous selves which evade the demands of the law (Greenblatt 1980: 237). As such he ends up revealing the dynamism of German identity in a period of intense political change, as well as the danger that State “unity” could wield “tyranny” over the diverse individuals under its government.

A brief sketch of Staden’s remarkable voyage illuminates the possible conflicts of his transformation with institutional demands on the traveler’s identity. In Part I of the *True History*,<sup>101</sup> Hans Staden suffers a shipwreck in Brazil, outside of the Habsburg Empire. After two years of starvation, he eventually comes to serve the king of Portugal as an arquebusier in southern Brazil, in the hopes of obtaining a reward. During his captivity as a “Portuguese” by the Tupinambá in 1554, which causes him to mentally collapse on several occasions, he negotiates and fictionalizes his national identity through an elaborate ruse, in which he claims to be French. The prominence, yet instability of terms of communal identity, such as “Portuguese,” “French,” and “Mameluke,” in the *True History* shows their contingency and lack of depth. Beyond this fiction of origins, Staden seems to transcend the limits of such categories altogether, through his improvisation of the role of “prophet” among the Tupinambá: he becomes a heteronomous subject, with a new, “transatlantic” identity. These dual yet parallel activities of fiction and prophecy permit him to escape the

---

<sup>100</sup> Part of this transformation of community identifiers has to do with problems of translation between the Tupinambá and European “political” systems, which I discuss in detail in a succeeding section of this chapter.

<sup>101</sup> The *True History* is divided into two main parts: the *Historia* (I) and the *Beschreibung* (II). Part I narrates Staden’s journey, while the second part features ethnographic information on the Tupinambá organized by topic.

position of enemy, avoid sacrifice in Tupinambá anthropophagic ritual, and finally travel back to Europe on a French ship. Yet upon arriving in France, Staden continues to refer to himself as a “prophet” who speaks out against “mercilessness and tyranny” (102). He presents this new cultural role as most powerful, generated by his face-to-face experience with death, which resulted in a permanent change in his “state of mind” (143).

The *True History*, most symbolically rendered as the tale of a Hessian who survived among cannibals through the force of his faith, was probably crafted to resonate with the German Provinces’ ‘triumph’ over the religious and political oppression of the Holy Roman Empire and the former Emperor Charles V following the 1555 Peace. This was a major victory of sovereign rights for the Protestant Princes, as it permitted local rulers to decide the sect of Christianity that would be followed in their own territories.<sup>102</sup> Landgrave Philip was one of the main proponents of the resulting policy of *cujus regio, ejus religio*—whose realm, his religion (Acton 278). According to Luciana Villas Bôas, this policy transformed “the profession of faith into a political gesture” (2005: 195). Staden’s text also co-circulated with numerous state-sponsored political histories, both Spanish and German, written in the wake of the Schmalkaldic War, such as Luis de Ávila y Zuñiga’s *Comentario de la Guerra de Alemania* (1548) and Johann Sleidan’s *Commentaries on Government and Religion in the Age of Charles V* (1555). These texts provided a range of perspectives on the conflict between Charles V and Landgrave Philip of Hesse, who was the co-founder of the Schmalkaldic League of Protestant Princes and, along with the Emperor, the protagonist of the War. Staden’s text, published under the authority of Hesse, was most probably a voice in these debates. It is worthwhile to recall that in

---

<sup>102</sup> James Pounder Whitney writes that the Peace of Augsburg “marks the height of the success of Protestantism” but that following 1555, “other causes were now working against it, and its own divisions were telling in the same direction” (117).

early modern Germany, it was common for travel histories of the Americas to be circulated as political or religious propaganda.<sup>103</sup> One example was Ulrich Schmidt's *Voyage*, a refutation of Cabeza de Vaca's *Comentarios*, published in 1567 at Frankfurt along with a reprint of Staden's text.<sup>104</sup> That Staden's life history may have served a political function is suggested not only by the historical context and the aforementioned emphasis on terms of communal identity, but also by the conditions under which it was "authored."

The interrogation to which Staden "submitted" in 1555 is a sign of his tale's veracity, according to Dryander: "Hans Staden was questioned closely, a long time ago, in my presence and in the presence of many others, by his Highness [Landgrave Hesse], our Gracious Lord, in all matters regarding his voyage and captivity" (Staden 15). Because Staden's self-representation as a prophet could have been read as exceeding or complicating the authorized narrative of Protestant salvation for the ordinary individual, he could not fully acknowledge his transformation to his Prince (Whitehead 2008: xxi). In his concluding address to the reader, however, Staden acknowledges the incomplete nature of his account: "It is true that I could have told a lot more, if it were fitting" (143). The word "fitting" not only signals a sense of propriety, but an active shaping, indicative of the censorship which demanded a rigorous narrative of Protestant salvation, and allowed the "prophet" to stand insofar as it was a strategy of survival and ethnological curiosity. Staden's first-person narrative, then, is framed both institutionally (by the Landgrave Philip and the

---

<sup>103</sup> Travel histories such as Staden's and Schmidt's thus were important forms of historical discourse that negotiated problems related to "national independence and [...] religious beliefs" throughout the sixteenth century in the Habsburg Empire (Domínguez xxx).

<sup>104</sup> Ulrich Schmidt (Schmidel) served alongside Domingo de Irala in Río de la Plata and experienced Cabeza de Vaca's government first-hand. His account of the period 1534-1554, *The Voyage of Ulrich Schmidt*, was published in 1567 at Frankfurt, and it was meant to refute Cabeza de Vaca's *Comentarios*. The *Voyage*'s publisher was the "vehement Anabaptist" Sebastian Franck, and another version was published by the Flemish Levinus Hulsius, who had been banned from his native Ghent by the King of Spain, Philip II, during the rebellion of the Low Countries.



Province of Hesse) and editorially (by Dryander). This means we must consider, side-by-side, the problematics of a cross-cultural autobiography with the potential objectives, and censorship, of the territorial State in asserting its newfound sovereignty over and against the Empire, in part through Staden's narrative. Indeed, in order to tell and publish his history as "true," Staden had to return to Hesse in 1555, with a passport [letters of identity] in hand, thus reentering the "legal," international framework and submitting his confession before Landgrave Philip. In his dedication to the Landgrave, as well as at two other points in the text, Staden reiterates the presentation of his passport: "and lest your Highness were to think that I tell tall tales, I personally offer your Highness a passport to support this report" (8). The documents appear here as a performative gesture and legal recording of his crossing of borders, corroborating the testimony of a man whose experience with alterity nevertheless proved the contingency of identity conveyed by such borders.

Through the cultural "break"<sup>105</sup> initiated in Staden through his journey and captivity, he became a heterodox subject—a prophet, with a passport in hand. As it turns out, Staden's past cannot be fully recovered for the aims of his sovereign. His life history reveals the limited ability of the territorial State, with newly restored sovereign rights, to appropriate a legally marginal individual's life history and cathect it to political critique of the Empire. Truth demanded of the individual, in the service of the sovereign's law, results in the replication of what, for the Germans, had been the oppression of the Holy Roman Empire.

*Charles V's historia pro persona and the histories of the Schmalkaldic War*

In 1547, at the same time as Staden was traveling, or fleeing, to Brazil, Charles

---

<sup>105</sup> Michel de Certeau defines alterity as "the difference which a cultural break puts forward" (1988: 209).

V was celebrating his victory over the Schmalkaldic League of Protestant Princes on the battlefield of Mühlberg, considered so significant for the unity of the Holy Roman Empire that Titian painted a grand portrait of the Emperor on this occasion. After this symbolically important victory, Charles V found renewed desire to promote himself as a “Christian Prince,” able to defeat not only the infidels in the Mediterranean but also able to subdue the heresies<sup>106</sup> in the German Provinces (Kagan 2009: 86). As part of the pursuit of the Emperor’s aggrandized reputation, in 1548, the “ilustre señor” Don Luis de Ávila y Zuñiga<sup>107</sup> published his “adulatory” *Comentario de la Guerra de Alemania hecha por Carlos V, máximo emperador romano, rey de España, en el año de 1546 y 1547* [Commentaries on the War of Germany waged by Charles V, Great Roman Emperor, in the years 1546 and 1547]. By briefly looking at the nature of political life writing in circulation during the aftermath of the Schmalkaldic War,<sup>108</sup> and its offensive portrayal of Landgrave Philip, whose humiliating defeat and imprisonment by Charles V are laid bare in the *Comentario*, I hope to shed light on the role of Staden’s text within this crossfire of political claims.

Ávila y Zuñiga’s history of the Schmalkaldic War, which concentrates on the rivalry between Charles V and the League’s founders, Landgrave Hesse and John Frederick of Saxony, was intended to generate positive publicity for the Empire and bolster Charles’ *reputación* as a basis for the reestablishment of religious unity in the German provinces (Kagan 2009: 68; Tracy 230).<sup>109</sup> This history of Charles V’s victory in the Schmalkaldic War was immediately translated into Latin, German,

---

<sup>106</sup> De Certeau writes of heresy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: it “becomes alterity which is insinuated into the margins *next to* common law, into a given space that cannot be reduced to an antilaw” (1988: 151).

<sup>107</sup> Ávila y Zuñiga was the Marquis of Mirabel, an “old soldier” and one of Charles V’s ambassadors who accompanied him in many military campaigns, including the Schmalkaldic War, and earlier, the failed Battle for Algiers in 1541. He also corresponded with the Italian historian Paolo Giovio.

<sup>108</sup> For a very detailed and interesting history of the formation of the Schmalkaldic League and the war with Charles V, see Thomas A. Brady, *Protestant Politics*, pp.142-327.

<sup>109</sup> This did not preclude, however, Charles from forcing Catholic practices upon the German peoples.

French, Italian and English, and published widely as part of Charles V's "publicity machine" (Kagan 2009: 68).<sup>110</sup> Modeled on Caesar's *Commentaries* of the Gallic War, the *Comentario* represented Charles V as "a new and improved version of the medieval emperor Charlemagne," able to conquer Germany in just a year rather than a lifetime, and served as an important *historia pro persona* (Kagan 2009: 83).

The *Comentario* lauds Charles V's achievement in the German Provinces in part by asserting the formidable power of the Schmalkaldic League, the Protestant Princes' "counter-empire," which Staden's patron co-founded in 1531. Ávila y Zuñiga refers to the League as supremely difficult to defeat: "there was nowhere in Germany where the Lutherans weren't the most powerful" (1). He notes how the League was designed to challenge imperial rule, and that, with each passing day, the Protestant Princes "pride [*soberbia*] grew along with the League." The League attempted to assert its own sovereignty (it had its own constitution, for example) and re-imagine the international political structure of the German Provinces against imperial intrusions into religious affairs: "Together they planned many things, that not only was the ruin of the Empire; because they designated a new Empire, and along with this, all the novelties that they needed to be new" (4). As Thomas A. Brady has shown, the 1540s and 1550s were decades of great political crisis and reorganization of the German provinces with respect to the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>111</sup> Traditionally, the German Provinces had been the heart of the Empire, but the medieval imperial structure of small territories and local rule was proving ineffectual with the advent of

---

<sup>110</sup> Richard Kagan lists numerous works that formed part of this publicity campaign. Additionally, around the same time as Ávila y Zuñiga's work appeared, the Schmalkaldic League's "official historian" Johann Sleidan began circulating parts of his *Commentaries on Government and Religion in the Age of Charles*, although the full history would only be published in 1555. This first Protestant history, ranging from the publication of Luther's theses in 1517 to the Peace of 1555, was also a bestseller, achieving 48 editions in six languages by 1560 (Kess 2). Sleidan divided his loyalties between the Schmalkaldic League and Charles V, and is notable for his allegiance to the Emperor and his hatred of Spain and the Spaniards.

<sup>111</sup> See Brady's "The German Reformation as a Political Event" in *Protestant Politics* (1995): 2-14

overseas imperialism and the shift of power to Spain. Clearly writing a history from the Spanish<sup>112</sup> vantage point, the author emphasizes the role of Spanish contingent against the Germans, who are most often referred to simply as “los enemigos” [the enemies].<sup>113</sup> The *Comentario*’s plot centers around the Emperor’s pursuit of his archenemies: “to uproot the Duke of Saxony and the Landgrave was the main point of the war” (30). More than the Duke of Saxony, Landgrave Philip emerges as the primary foe: a flawed villain, of bad temperament, whose deviant beliefs had led him to enact a widespread heresy and rebellion against the legitimate government. For other cities and provinces to make peace with the Emperor, they had to formally declare their enmity with the two founders of the Schmalkaldic League. Ávila y Zuñiga refers to Landgrave Philip’s deeds as “desvergüenzas” [shameless acts], showing him to be delusional regarding his perceived victories over the Emperor. The historian portrays the Landgrave as deceitful, exaggerating his performance in battle to request funds from the cities allied to the League towards his ultimate goal of expulsing Charles V from Germany, or arresting him.

Even though most of the *Comentario*’s highly descriptive passages only serve to report details of the various skirmishes of the Schmalkaldic War, Ávila y Zuñiga’s depiction of the “enemy,” as prisoner, is suggestive. Hesse’s co-conspirator, the Duke of Saxony is defeated on the field and offers himself up to the “most powerful and highest Emperor” Charles V, who responds with irony: “You refer to me much

---

<sup>112</sup> Further, Ávila y Zuñiga details how the Germans greet Charles *in* Spanish, rather than their native tongue, so he would feel more comfortable: an irony for Spain’s *rey extranjero*. The historian relates, as well, how the Germans, once defeated by imperial forces, also refer to the Emperor as *unser fater*, “our father.” Yet when a prisoner addresses Charles V in this manner, the Emperor responds strongly to his German audience: “You all, who are scoundrels [*bellacos*], are not my sons,” indicating instead that the Spanish “hombres de bien” [good men] surrounding him were of a truer filiation (206).

<sup>113</sup> It is interesting to note that the text’s comments on the generalized “enemy” nearly amounts to an ethnography; the Germans are described as alien and distant, and their customs discussed as curiosities. Ávila y Zuñiga writes, “I want to tell other things that I have experienced with regard to this people (*nación*),” then detailing their astute techniques of battle, and even the “foreign” nature of their artillery. In another instance, he refers to the Germans as a “ferozísima nación” [most fierce people], a kind of language that one finds in many travel histories of the Americas.

differently now, than you used to.” Here the Emperor alludes to the fact that Landgrave Hesse and the “barbarous and proud” Duke of Saxony used to address their imperial correspondence to “Charles of Ghent, who *thinks* he is Emperor” (286). The Landgrave, “the root of all evil in Germany,” was the final quarry for the Emperor in the Schmalkaldic War. Ávila y Zuñiga cites the details of the Emperor’s conditions for the Landgrave’s surrender, including his giving over villas and money. Most importantly, however, he was to pledge fidelity to Charles V. Although no one believed it would happen, near the end of the *Comentario*, the Landgrave kneels before the Emperor and issues a lengthy apology for his rebellion. Ávila y Zuñiga quotes the entirety of his self-effacing speech, which is given in third-person, to which Charles reacts by saying that, although he ought to cut off the Landgrave’s head, or at least imprison him for life, he would show him mercy as long as he complied with the capitulations previously specified. “At first the Landgrave received his imprisonment with great impatience,” writes the historian with irony, “since he thought, not being for life, it would be a light burden, and he would be allowed to go hunting” (327). As a history announcing the Spanish and Imperial triumph over the German Provinces, the *Comentario* takes pains to show the Landgrave as the direct source of unrest in Christendom, perhaps even more than the outlaw Luther, because of his capacity to translate the Protestant heresy into political form, backed with military might. The symbolic force of Charles V’s achievement in Germany was taken, at the time, to mean the end of Protestant schism, and was celebrated by the Pope.

The violence of unity and division, the downfall of the Protestant Princes, as well as the threat of literal and figurative captivity for leaders and subjects alike, were the context for Staden’s escape from the Habsburg Empire to Brazil in 1547. His narrative includes many experiences apparently symbolic of these factors, particularly in his representation of cannibals, which additionally had overtones related to the

Catholic Eucharist.<sup>114</sup> The Schmalkaldic war directly impacted Staden's life, as well as that of his patron and professor: the inhabitants of thirty defeated cities were forced to practice Catholicism—to participate in “foreign” rites and ceremonies which no longer reflected their inner sense of who they had become through the Protestant faith. In addition, the rift of the Reformation was not only religious, as the existence of the Schmalkaldic League indicated. The Princes dissented from the Castilian-centered, expansionist imperial rule of Charles V, and its disrespect of Germany's traditional “particularism.” Traditionally, the Emperor had had little say in the affairs of each constituent State or Province of the Habsburg Empire, following the principle of “*Rex imperator in regno suo*.” During the Reformation, however, this no longer held true, as Charles V held tightly to his vision of a religiously unified Empire. Indeed, many Europeans gave consideration to the idea that the Spaniards were charged with the task of bringing the entire “world” under the rule of the *imperator*; in some circles, this empire was the “final” *translatio imperii* prophesied by the Bible, in Daniel 2:44<sup>115</sup> (Pagden 1995: 44): all other kingdoms would be “broken” and “consumed” in the service of this consolidation. The Schmalkaldic League, defending its rights to religious determination, would not allow for such incorporation. Charles V hoped that, following his war against the Protestants, “having united and purified Western Christendom he would march at its head against the Infidel, regain the East for the

---

<sup>114</sup> Travel narratives about Brazilian “cannibals” often played into the politics of the religious divides concerning the Eucharist (transubstantiation vs. consubstantiation), as was explicitly the case of the conflicts between the Calvinist minister De Léry and the Catholic priest, Thévet, in the context of the French Wars of Religion. Montaigne, as well, claimed that the “barbarity” of French massacres of these Wars was greater than that of Tupinambá cannibals: as he famously writes in his essay, “On Cannibals,” “I conceive there is more barbarity in eating a man alive, than when he is dead [...] under the colour of piety and religion” (95). In his essay, “On Coaches,” Montaigne also compares Tupinambá cannibalism to that of the Spaniards, who “devoured one another” in their civil wars of greed in the Americas (440).

<sup>115</sup> The full quote is as follows (King James Bible): “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” (Daniel 2:44).

orthodox faith, and be crowned in Jerusalem” (Acton 249). This dream of unification and universality spoke of the essence of the Habsburg Empire, and marked Charles V’s sovereignty and official historiography indelibly: “it was impossible for Charles even to contemplate a permanent toleration of schism or heresy” (247). Yet this is what the Protestants had asked for and what made war for Charles V inevitable: “the Reformation of the Empire became incompatible with the Reformation of the Church” (279).

The clash of local and imperial sovereignty between the “*Reichsstädte*” or “free cities” of the German Provinces and the Empire in the Reformation was one of the most important and troubling problems of Charles V’s entire reign, threatening to divide his territories. Many German communities considered that a worldwide *imperium*, in the hands of Charles V, “far from being a liberation from external and internal threat and guaranteeing the survival of the *respublica christiana*, seemed to promise only the final and irreversible extinction of the rights of all free men” (Pagden 1995: 44). In fact, in 1535 Guillaume du Bellay, the French diplomat and ambassador to Germany, warned the Princes of the Schmalkaldic League in an attempt to secure their alliance with France against the Emperor, that “Charles V’s use of the title *Caesar invictissimus*, with its sinister military overtones, spelt out for all the independent rulers of Germany the emperor’s ambition to reduce them all to a condition of slavery” (44). The Empire had become a space of oppression and violence, a place where religious identity and diversity was in peril. These concerns underscore the importance of Staden’s *True History* taking place in Brazil, which was also the setting for several empires competing for dominance<sup>116</sup>: by virtue of the *mise-*

---

<sup>116</sup> In addition to the French colony at Rio de Janeiro, the Spanish, just to the south in Rio de la Plata, were a continual presence in Brazil as well. Later in the sixteenth century they would constitute the largest non-Portuguese, non-indigenous presence. This had to do in part with the fact that the Portuguese Empire allowed foreign settlers (*donatarios*), and land holders could be of any national affiliation, so long as they were Catholic (Schwartz 35).

*en-scène*, the text is already a potential affront to Charles V's aspirations.

Nonetheless, Germany's dissent from Charles V's Empire had consequences for its own sense of coherence as a nation and political function as a confederation of territorial states. The country was most remarkable, at the moment of the Reformation, for "its fragmentation into the famous patchwork quilt of states" (Hughes 7). As Brady puts it, in the sixteenth century, "lacking fixed boundaries, devoid of a concept, how is the German principality to be understood, if at all?" (236). As such, "Germany" and "German" were shaky concepts; at the time, it was the "least-well defined country in Europe" (240). Further, the prominent role of the banking families, the Welser and the Fugger, in providing the necessary credit for Charles V's imperialist aims in the Americas, only emphasized the unstable political allegiances in this period. Based in Augsburg, these bankers set up offices all throughout Europe. The Welser were especially involved in the colonization of the Americas, and thus had offices in Seville and Santo Domingo, in addition to a permanent representative at the Spanish court. In 1528, Charles V even granted the Welser the license to explore and colonize Venezuela.<sup>117</sup> Staden, as we have seen, traveled to Brazil in his second voyage on a Spanish ship, financed by the Welser family. Bankers such as these, who were most akin to modern capitalist, multinational companies, crossed borders and oceans in the pursuit of profits, just like Staden. The German territorial State, or Province, after 1555, attempted to create a greater sense of cohesion by magnifying the role of the Prince. As such, only a few years after Staden's initial journey overseas, Landgrave of Hesse's humiliation had been reversed and his power as a Prince had been amplified.

---

<sup>117</sup> The Welser's influence on Spanish imperial expansion, and to some degree, on its historiography, was considerable. Nicolás Federman, a German employed by the Welser to effect this exploration of Tierra Firme (now Venezuela), and who published a chronicle about the Indies, *Historia Indianische*, would later be prosecuted for violation of his contract, and died at Valladolid in 1545. See Juan Friede, *Vida y viajes de Nicolás de Federman*.



The increased freedom and power for the German princes as a result of the Peace, however, did not equate to freedom of the people: the residents of territorial states were forced to follow their prince's choice of religion.<sup>118</sup> The terms of Protestant triumph had its limits, important to Staden's status as "prophet." Specifically, the Peace of Augsburg did not tolerate sects other than Lutheranism, such as those promoted by Calvin, Socinus, or Zwingli. As such, even after 1555, when Staden returned to Hesse as a passport-bearing "prophet," there was much instability regarding the rights of individuals and their relationship to the collective, even within Hesse. As Villas Bôas has discussed, Reformation Germany was characterized by its "expansion of secular control of personal life and the use of institution realms of knowledge [...] to enforce confessional homogeneity and social discipline. [...] the Landgravian administration tied religious life to a strict disciplinary regime" (2006: 51). Certainly, for the German individual, the "intensified" power of the princes, and the limited terms of the Peace, was just as oppressive as that of the Emperor had been (Brady 1995: 8; Hughes 50). The models of sovereignty then in circulation were simulacra of Charles' *imperium*, with only marginal admission of alterity. For example, in Reformation Germany, those who refused the major confessions were referred to as "false brethren" or "mad saints," and extremists were imprisoned (Hughes 45). For Staden's book to be "official" history, he had to conceal his heterogeneity: "The notion that an individual's belief was subject to secular control, in particular through the so-called *Glaubensverhör* is at the heart of the official legitimation of Staden's book" (Villas Bôas 2006: 51). The law, now in the hands of Landgrave Hesse, impossibly demanded a unitary subjectivity from Staden to fulfill the demands of truth and readability of a history that might also be deployed as

---

<sup>118</sup> Article 17 of the *Religious Peace of Augsburg* states that "all such as do not belong to the two above named religions shall not be included in the present peace but be totally excluded from it" (The Religious Peace of Augsburg).

political discourse of the new territorial State. Staden's history—which is also an autobiography— is anything but that, instead revealing the myriad roles open to European “improvisation” on the other side of the Atlantic, and the oft-denied reciprocal capacity for such experience with alterity to fictionalize, or destabilize, European ideologies (Greenblatt 1980: 228).

*Truth, Alterity, Empire: The Antipodes*

The preoccupation with establishing the veracity of Staden's tale is the main subject of Professor Dryander's introduction to the *True History*. At one level this is a typical concern of ensuring the believability of the traveler's experience. His introduction grounds the text as “true” because of Staden's origin, Homburg in Hesse: “In addition, he comes from this country, as do his parents, and he does not wander around from place to place like the gypsies, vagabonds, or liars” (10).<sup>119</sup> Yet curiously, later in the introduction, Dryander probes further into the nature of truth of eyewitness experience by his meditation on alterity, that is, on the Antipodes.<sup>120</sup> Notably, the Antipodes were also a classical *topos* regarding the limits and ambitions of imperial power. Dryander also invoked the idea of “cultural inversion” in defining the Antipodes as “humans...who stand at the other side of the earth, down below us, walking with their feet directed towards us, and their heads and bodies hanging down towards the sky, without falling off” (12). The existence of these lands and peoples had been debated since antiquity, and it remained a topic of great interest and

---

<sup>119</sup> Since identity and identification papers were often forged, this concern for establishing truth through witnesses or origin was substantiated. Such a concern, however, reinforced the need to conform identity to fixed, legal, and imperially inflected categories. See Valentin Groebner, *Who are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* (2007).

<sup>120</sup> The original term was coined by Plato in his *Timaeus* (Moretti 243) The Antipodes had been imagined as an uninhabitable region, or one populated only by “monstrous races”; they were also satirized, as in the case of Lucian's *Vera Historia* (247). See also María Jesús Lacarra and Juan Manuel Cacho Blecua, *Lo imaginario en la conquista de América* (1990).

controversy in the sixteenth century. Many chroniclers of the New World, such as Gómara and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, discussed it in their works.<sup>121</sup> Through Staden's testimony and experience *ex diametro*, the Antipodes could be confirmed as "real" or "true", but remained "strange"—difficult to accept *as true*—and, for most of known history, out of reach of imperial ambition. Even so, for the Romans, "the inhabitants of the Antipodes, had no separate identity as communities—much less as political powers—and that, in the nature of things, they would one day be absorbed into the *Imperium*, the world, itself" (Pagden 1995: 50). Staden's *True History* and other New World explorers challenged this imperial reasoning, however, when they made it apparent that the Antipodes had never heard of the "name or fame" of the Caesars. This served as an unwelcome reminder of the precariousness of the project of *dominum mundi*, which Charles V claimed to inherit (50), and its unsuitability as a political model for the Holy Roman Empire. Dryander's frame thus confirms De Certeau's observations on the structure of travel narrative in his *Heterologies*:

In travel accounts, this 'historical frame' entertains a double relation to the picture it supports. On the one hand, the frame is necessary to assure the strangeness of the picture. On the other, it draws upon the representation for the possibility of transforming itself: the discourse that sets off in search of the other with the impossible task of saying the truth returns from afar with the authority to speak in the name of the other and command belief (1997: 69).

As a Humanist topic of debate, and an "ethnographic" concern of New World travelers, the Antipodes served as a nexus between authority and alterity, invoking Staden's split-image of the passport-bearer and the prophet. Implicitly, however, this was also an affront to the ambitions of imperial forms of authority. By representing the Antipodes as known but nevertheless strange—alluding to the "cannibals" among whom Staden lived for nine months—Dryander delimits the legibility of imperial forms of knowledge and power. Nevertheless, by asserting such a frame around such

---

<sup>121</sup> See Gomára, *Historia de las Indias* and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios Reales*.

strangeness to assert “truth,” Dryander in some sense replicates the Empire’s “absorption” and erasure the identities of individuals who literally were, or had been in touch with, alterity. In this case, the professor seeks to re-absorb the errant Staden into the greater narrative of Hesse as a territorial State, as its Landgrave was newly restored to legal, sovereign status and freed from Charles V.

### *Staden’s Two Voyages to Brazil*

As a travel narrative related to Euro-imperialism in the Americas,<sup>122</sup> Staden’s *True History* had the potential to construct, as well as disrupt, concepts of European empire. Mary Louise Pratt has established that early modern travel narratives both facilitated and criticized expansionist tendencies of European States. Spaces of alterity both complicated and “created” Europe: “Borders and all, the entity called Europe was constructed from the outside in as much as from the inside out” (6). It was from a place outside Empire, in the sparsely settled, mercantilist outpost of colonial Brazil, that the bulk of the *True History* unfolded. Staden’s account is a “standard” travel narrative with tripartite structure: departure, encounter with alterity and captivity, and return. Many travel narratives of this time period, including Jean De Léry’s, had a similar structure. According to the *True History*’s table of contents, the first part, the *Historia*, describes Staden’s “two sea voyages”; the second, Staden’s service to the Portuguese and his capture by the Tupinambá; and the third, Staden’s delivery from captivity and his return to “his beloved fatherland,” where the “father” was no longer Charles V, but Landgrave Hesse. The prefatory material, however, is extremely important as I have mentioned before, for its framing of the main narrative and its

---

<sup>122</sup> As Dwight TenHuisen states, “Staden participates directly in the master narrative of the colonial project in the New World” (214).

claims to truth. It also reveals, to some degree, Staden's motive for publication and worldview. In his brief but passionate dedication of the book to Landgrave Hesse, which is based on King David's Psalm 107, Staden shows that, from the "place of his writing," the world is divided into three regions: a "desired haven," a place of peril, and the oceanic divide between them. This structure of the world, according to Staden, challenges mankind to need and call on God, in order to know Him. This is Staden's primary emplotment for his horrific and yet transformative experience. At the same time as being a personal testimony for his "vision" of God, Staden's narrative is a text of survival (entrance, captivity, and escape) in a space of alterity prior to his return to "your Highness' principality, my beloved fatherland" (8). Staden's repetitive use of the term fatherland, *Vaterland* (*patria*),<sup>123</sup> is very significant, especially in Hesse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (von Friedeburg 170). Importantly, after the Reformation, *Vaterland* refers to the prince's jurisdiction, not to the Empire, and, as Robert von Friedeburg shows, it is a term which embodied the desire to serve the local prince while at the same time representative of "national" sentiment. Yet for Staden to represent his return to Hesse also entailed his return, via memory, to the "distress" and "miserable risk to life and limb" he had escaped in Brazil: his physical rescue had to be followed by the rescuing and performance of his own traumatic history, meant to be "read aloud," according to Staden's comments in his dedication.

Despite the difficulty in rendering his memory in words, Staden makes clear the pressure to make the past legible and meaningful to interlocutors. One example of this is evident in the woodcut<sup>124</sup> print of the map of Brazilian harbors, which Staden

<sup>123</sup> I.A.A. Thompson discusses the importance of this term to Spain's formation as a nation in the sixteenth and seventeenth century in "Castile, Spain and the Monarchy: the Political Community from *patria natural* to *patria nacional*" in *Spain, Europe and the Atlantic: Essays in Honour of John H. Elliott* (1995): 125-159.

<sup>124</sup> The 55 woodcut prints are one of the most remarkable and interesting features of Staden's *True History*, both in their number and their original representation of Tupinambá society. Woodcut prints

includes as prefatory material. He states that he has drawn these places “all in a manner easily understood by the experts, and according to the best of my memory.” We can extrapolate from this statement and infer that the style of the map of his life is tuned to the supposed exigencies of “experts” and “officials,” but is ultimately limited by Staden’s memory. The contours and content of his memory of a “strange” place is, on the level of form, already interpreted—“truth” and alterity are juxtaposed from the *True History*’s outset. This is important when we consider Staden’s narrative voice, which, we will recall, is framed by Dr. Dryander’s introduction and role as editor. Dryander, in effect, elevates Staden’s text from the testimony of a “simple man” to the level of Humanist historiographical discourse. The *True History*, through symbolic and linguistic ambiguity, could then be joined to other types of discourses, such as scientific, or political, able to be read and interpreted by “experts.” The “truth” is locatable somewhere between the “ordinary man” and “knowledgeable persons:”

Yet nothing is gained by mutilating the truth for the sake of lies. One has to note that many matters appear incredible to the ordinary man, yet when they are presented to knowledgeable persons who assess them, they are found to be the known and proved facts that they really are (11).

Dryander’s preface, in attempting to establish the veracity of Staden’s account, nonetheless proves to be slippery in epistemological terms. He suggests here that the ordinary man is the audience, but later affirms the superior knowledge of eyewitnesses. Who can tell the truth? Who can satisfactorily interpret information from otherwise unknown peoples and regions?

The title page, which also features a woodcut “portrait” of a reclining cannibal, claims that Staden’s narrative relates that which was “unknown in Hesse, until two years ago when Hans Staden from Homberg in Hesse came to know of it through his

---

were very common in pamphlets and books describing exotic phenomena, but were often recycled. Staden’s woodcuts in the Marburg edition, on the other hand, were of his own design (Whitehead 2008: xv; Villas Bôas 2005: 184).

own experiences, and now makes it known in print.” Staden’s life seems to be worthy of being printed and disseminated insofar as it produces a special kind of knowledge that can be appropriated by other discourses, that is, by professionals who have access to a “global” concept of humanity. Ultimately, Dryander relies on Staden’s “simplicity” to produce this knowledge: it is another assertion of truth amidst alterity. As De Certeau points out in *Heterologies*, Montaigne also used the artificial construct of “simple” discourse to gain authority in his essay, “On Cannibals,” while concealing his true sources and thus his embellishments. As Montaigne writes,

I long had a man in my house that lived ten or twelve years in the New World [...] in that part of it where Villegaignon landed, which he called Antarctic France [...] This man that I had was a plain ignorant fellow, and therefore the more likely to tell truth: for your better bred sort of men are much more curious in their observation, ‘tis true, and discover a great deal more, but then they gloss upon it, and to give the greater weight to what they deliver and allure your belief, they cannot forbear a little to alter the story; they never represent things to you simply as they are [...] Now in this case we should either have a man of irreproachable veracity, or so simple that he has not wherewithal to contrive (92-93)

Staden’s simple style, then, is given rhetorical force, yet it cannot stand alone, without Dryander’s frame and “verification.” Unlike Montaigne’s “man,” however, Staden has a significant role in the authorship of his life history. In Staden’s description of his first voyage, the language of his self-reporting is initially straightforward, a documentary record in the first-person, describing his job as an arquebusier on a Portuguese vessel transporting convicts to America, which had “permission to attack the ships that were trading with the White Moors in Barbary” (21). From the outset, the text comments on the multiplicity of national or regional identities that mixed together on these mercantilist voyages. En route to Brazil, Staden comes across people from numerous origins: other Germans, Portuguese, Valencians, Castilians, and Moors, some of whom he names specifically in the *True History*’s concluding address (144). After capturing a North African vessel laden with

goods, Staden and his crew set sail to Pernambuco on the coast of Brazil, while charged with attacking any French “interlopers” they might encounter. Staden seems to have been traveling on a type of privateering or corsair ship, which gives us a sense of the nature of transatlantic Colonial enterprise, and how in practice, the actual agents of imperial expansion often occupied a space that we could call the “interstices” of empire.<sup>125</sup> This depiction of the outboard voyage is comparable to Jean de Léry’s voyage to the Americas, the most “relevant counterpoint” to the *True History*, suggesting that Staden’s account is reliable (Whitehead 2008: xxxvi). De Léry’s *Histoire* also reflects the “international” complexity of the transatlantic enterprise, noting the corsair-like interaction between the French, Spanish, Moors, Portuguese and even the Irish (10), corroborating Staden’s experience. However, De Léry does not highlight these identities in the same fashion as Staden, nor does he stage the fictionalization of identity, since the Frenchman, never taken captive, had no motive to do so.

The immediacy of Staden’s account, transmitted in “testimonial” style, cannot be found in De Léry’s sophisticated and “distanced” account of the year he spent as a Calvinist missionary in Brazil, in 1557, at Nicolas de Villegaignon’s Fort Coligny in modern day Rio de Janeiro. From this “Protestant refuge,” De Léry made trips to visit and observe the Tupinambá. The notes he took served as the basis for his various drafts of his *Histoire*, which was not published until nearly two decades later, in 1578. The Calvinist minister’s style, despite his eyewitness account, is most comparable to Dryander’s preface to Staden’s work because of the editor’s engagement with Renaissance Humanist historiography. Although De Léry laments the absence of “fine

---

<sup>125</sup> It is helpful to recall Homi Bhabha’s assertion in the Introduction to *Location of Culture*, that “it is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2).



flowers of rhetoric” in his account, he is clearly skilled in practices of Humanism, even quoting the *Aeneid*, *Orlando Furioso*, and alluding to the myth of Tantalus, in decided contrast to Staden’s more restricted capacity (or desire) to quote. The few times Staden does so, it is in a very organic fashion, and apparently limited to the psalms (of course, as a minister, De Léry also quotes Psalm 107 to justify the trials of arriving to America by sea). His text is highly self-conscious of his craft, aware and engaged with other texts about the Americas (including those by López de Gómara), and well-versed in the *topoi* of contemporary travel histories. He includes diverse materials, such as Nicholas de Villegaignon’s letter, speeches, prayers, a colloquy in French and Tupi, as well as a detailed critique of Thévet and other authors.

The stark difference between these two histories on the level of narrative voice and style is exemplified by Staden’s relation of his first landfall in Brazil, one filled with terror and violence, as he finds himself caught up in a prolonged attack of the Christians, Moors, settlers and their slaves by “savages” at Iguaçu. It is here that something beyond documentary reporting emerges, something far more subjective and vivid, where words begin to fail as adequate representation of experience: not out of marveling, as in De Léry’s case, but out of fear, more akin to what Rolena Adorno characterized as Cabeza de Vaca’s “negotiations of fear” (1991:167). Words like “savage” and “strange” along with a general sense of Staden’s increasing alienation, appear in the narrative. As in the case of Montaigne’s essay, “On Cannibals,” the reader is invited to ponder “the status of the strange” (De Certeau 1997: 67). Staden paints European survival in Brazil as precarious and provisional, on the edge of “extermination,” even as it is most often the “savages” who suffer the brunt of the violent encounter with the invaders. Numerically at a great disadvantage, Staden and his shipmates eventually escape harm’s way, and begin their return to Europe. This journey is also exceptionally difficult. Arriving in Lisbon in 1548, Staden then

traveled on an English ship to Seville, where he joined a Spanish expedition to the Río de la Plata region.

We might wonder what drove Staden to undertake another journey to Brazil, or in this case, to Río de la Plata, given the harrowing experience he had just returned from. Like many other adventurers, he sought “the abundance of gold that is supposedly found” in the Americas, which he mentions as a primary reason for his joining the second voyage. In any case, running the risk of more war and starvation in South America apparently outweighed the possibility of returning to Hesse, with its Prince in prison and its religious freedom under siege. And indeed, this second journey went even worse than the first. After shipwreck, Staden remained at Santa Catarina, in southern Brazil, for two years, “[suffering] great hunger,” subsisting on “lizards, field-rats, and the other strange food that we could get.” This is quite different from De Léry’s experience, as he traveled to an established fort, Coligny, while some of the first scenes of his experience there include a formal dinner. Staden’s experience of Brazil was more visceral and threatening. Eventually, he was able to find the Portuguese colony at São Vicente, and began to serve the Portuguese as a gunner in Fort Bertioga, on the nearby island of São Amaro.

*“The reward for my services”: Staden as “Portuguese”*

Already we have seen two important aspects of Staden’s narrative: first, the way it highlights terms of identity, that at times seem overwhelming in their multiplicity; and second, the erasure of significance of such terms by the threat of the “savage” and the “strange.” Staden’s shifting identities, affiliation, and alliances, as a “German” and not a member of one of the overseas imperial states—rather he was more of a mercenary—is even more precarious in Brazil, proving to have little

anchoring. At times he portrays himself as Castilian, and sometimes Portuguese. Yet, at the same time, communal identity was a category that could mean life or death, as Brazil was apparently demarcated by indigenous rivalries and divisions, partly as a result of the European invasion: the Carijós, allies of Spain, would not suffer the Tupiniquins; the Tupiniquins, who favored the Portuguese, were also enemies of the Tupinambá to the north, who, in turn, were friendly with the French.

Approximately between 1551 and 1554, however, this instability is allayed for Staden through his service as an arquebusier at two Portuguese forts. After so much time stranded amidst the “strange,” his service seems to have provided him with the illusion of a firm, if temporary, identity. He is very influenced by his role in the imperial structure of power, as well as by his perceived proximity to the figure of the Portuguese sovereign, Dom Manuel. He identifies Brazilian lands as “belonging” to the King of Portugal, for example (32), and “defends” them *against* the indigenous. Yet the fort where Staden serves the Portuguese, Bertioga, is not only “built in the savage manner” but was also defended by “mamelukes”<sup>126</sup> at the time of Staden’s arrival. Mamelukes typically were descendents of indigenous Brazilians and black Africans, and as a category of cultural mixing, were “skilled in the savage and the Christian” (Villas Bôas 2005: 202). Despite the decided “in-between” nature of the colony and fort, Staden’s service to the Portuguese king is an important turning point in the narrative, and he begins to actively construct a self through deeds and accomplishments. He is clearly concerned with his connections to the Portuguese, but also shows himself as surpassing them in skill and work ethic. For example, about his

---

<sup>126</sup> A mameluke, or Mamlūk, in its original usage, literally meant a “thing possessed.” The Mamlūk was usually an Egyptian or Ottoman military slave, who was often able to rise to power. Lisa Voigt (2009) notes the interconnectedness of the Mediterranean and American worlds exemplified in terms such as these and the Spanish *genízaro*, displaced from their original contexts and indicative of a special kind of *mestizaje* or biological and cultural mixing (10-11). See the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, “Mamlūk,” for more information.

defense of the half-built bulwark at São Amaro, he writes, “no Portuguese arquebusier dared to stay there” (45). Staden takes the risk because he would have a wage and “favors” from the king of Portugal “who was particularly inclined to show himself as a merciful lord towards those who offered help and counsel in these new lands” (45).

After an initial period of service of four months, the Portuguese ask Staden to remain there for another two years on the condition that he would be swiftly returned to Portugal to “obtain the reward” for his services (46). He also notes that “the commander [Tomé de Souza] gave me the privileges that are customarily bestowed on those among the king’s arquebusiers, who demand it” (46). Staden portrays himself as favored and heroic, and with direct connection to the king of Portugal, surpassing any of that ruler’s own subjects. And at the same time, Staden himself gained social power, despite his terrible working conditions—his “assistants” were actually slaves. “I had a savage man from a group called Carios. He was my slave,” (47) writes Staden, of this apparently “natural” situation. Prior to his captivity, sovereignty and markers of nationality multiply and mix, but the gunner’s association with Portugal grounds his self-performance and self-worth: his legibility as an agent of the sovereign, based on his ambition of profit and status.

*From “Pet” to “Prophet”: Staden among the Tupinambá*

In 1554, Staden was captured as an enemy “Portuguese” at Bertioga by Tupinambá warriors: his affiliation with the Portuguese at the fort, it would seem, had its risks. Just prior to Staden’s capture, his new identity as slave-owner and gunner at the service of the Portuguese king intersected with Staden’s former identity, associated with his fatherland, when one of his fellow Hessians, Heliodorus Hesus, who worked with the sugarcane plantations in Brazil, comes to visit him. They were to have a meal

together and, for that reason, Staden went into the forest to get the meat his slave had caught the previous day. This invocation of the fatherland is important because it recalls the criteria of truth set forth by Dryander who, in his introduction, mentions this particular meeting for its potential to corroborate Staden's version of events if Heliodorus were to return to Germany. Since the most sensational and controversial aspect of this travel history was Staden's captivity, then having a witness from Hesse to validate Staden's disappearance from Bertioaga was vital, even though he would have known nothing of the conditions of Staden's captivity or transformation.

As the *True History* relates, once Staden enters the forest, he is immediately surrounded by Tupinambá warriors. Images of division structure Staden's representation of his first encounters with the Amerindian "enemies":

As I was walking through the forest, loud screaming—such as that made by savages—sounded both sides of the path. People came running towards me. Then I recognized them. They had surrounded me on all sides and were pointing their bows and arrows at me and shot at me. Then I cried out: may God now have mercy on my soul. I had scarcely uttered these words, when they beat me to the ground, and shot and stabbed at me. God be praised that they only wounded me in the leg. They tore the clothes from my body: one the jerkin, another the hat, a third the shirt, and so forth. (48-49)

Staden is then quarreled over, "seized," and taken to "a great crowd" gathered to appraise their quarry. The people are "decorated with feathers" and "bit their arms," which Staden immediately interprets as them threatening to eat him. He is confronted by the "king" of these people and identified as a slave, and a Portuguese, on whom they intend to avenge the deaths of their friends. The imagery of "ripping apart" and cutting replicates as the scene unfolds and the integrity of Staden's "I" is progressively broken down. While several members of the hunting party were disputing over who caught him, "each of them demanded a piece of me," writes Staden (49). Staden recounts how his fellows from the fort seek to rescue him but are unsuccessful, and so he begins to pray: "Being so full of fear and despair, I considered matters to which I had never given a thought before, namely, the vale of tears in which we lead our lives.

Then I began to sing [...] from the bottom of my heart [...] the Psalm [130]" (51). This is the first indication of the radical nature of Staden's personal transformation, sparked by his captivity. As Staden writes in the poem which concludes Part I of the *True History*, "I cannot believe that a man can pray from the bottom of his heart / Unless a danger to his life [...] or tribulation comes upon him" (104).

This is also the first moment the reader sees the incommensurability of the European and Tupinambá cultures. The Tupinambá do not understand Staden's prayer and, according to the narrator, marvel at his "moaning." At the same time, their claims, such as "you are my bound animal [pet]" are decipherable but not fully understood by Staden (52). Staden, as well as De Léry, is considered to have been at least proficient in the Tupi language, which allowed both writers access into some aspects of Tupi culture. This knowledge accounts, in part, for the validity of the majority of their ethnological observations, although these were riddled with problems of translation on a conceptual level. Forsyth (1985) gives a very detailed account demonstrating Staden's linguistic proficiency and corroborating the reliability of the captive's claim to have spoken Tupi (20-24). The language of the Tupinambá was the "lingua franca" of Brazil for many years, until the end of the sixteenth century (23). As someone who traveled from country to country and spent significant amounts of time with the Spanish and Portuguese, Staden probably knew how to pick up the essentials of a language. He also, as we know, kept a Carijó slave at Bertioga, whose language was similar to Tupi. However, unlike De Léry who comments on the grammatical structures of Tupi and offers a dictionary in Chapter 20 of his *Histoire*, Staden's knowledge of Tupi seems to have been learned casually for its practical, rather than pedagogical, value.

Nonetheless, as Hélène Clastres describes them, Staden's observations were "naïve" (2). This lack of understanding should not only be attributed to the fact that

Staden was not a “trained” ethnographer, but also the fact that he did not set out to be an ethnographer: he was a captive, and only an observer and participant in Tupinambá culture *malgré lui*. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his voluntary pursuit and “penetration” of a tribe of Tupi-Kawahib in the twentieth century, attested to the difficulties of understanding the other, but also to the problems for the generation of narrative if the sense of alterity were to collapse. “There they were,” he relates in *Tristes Tropiques*, “ready to teach me their customs and beliefs, and I knew nothing of their language. They were as close to me as an image seen in a looking-glass: I could touch, but not understand them” (326). But, if one were to achieve true understanding, the fascination would end: “No sooner are such people known, or guessed at, than their strangeness drops away, and one might as well have stayed in one’s own village” (327). As such, the European who analyzes or writes about the “savage” must push his remarks “a certain distance, if we are to make them intelligible, and yet they must be cut off half-way, since the people whom they astonish are very like those for whom the customs in question are a matter of course” (327). Lévi-Strauss wonders, is this distancing deceit, or fraud? Or is it simply the textual bind maintained by a need for difference to fuel discursivity?

Since sixteenth century travel histories were tools of Euro-imperialism, these problems of translation and elision or appropriation of alterity were also of political importance. As Eric Cheyfitz has argued, the European imperial attitude constituted an “act of dispossession” of authentic meaning, in this case of Native Americans, in which “others become a useable fiction” (105). The gulf between proto-capitalist or mercantilist, and kin-ordered society was, and is, profound: concepts like “sovereignty,” “king,” and “nation” are purely Western: they *do not translate* across cultures (Cheyfitz 1997). Taiaiake Alfred states, with regard to the word “sovereignty,” that such terms belong to a “framework of internal colonization” (33).

These European concepts were used to exert control over Native American cultures, to incorporate alterity into discourses of imperial truth: the absorption of the Antipodes that the Romans so longed for. Such processes of translation were insidious, paving the way for the “legal” invasion of European powers by a misrecognition, erasure, or misinterpretation of Native American kinship and community, based economies, identities, and structures of power. This may account, in part, for the reason that Staden’s transformation among the Tupinambá was not fully representable to a European audience. Given his demand of a legal, unitary subject, Staden’s Prince is unable to take into account the nature of the traveler’s transformation. This change in Staden’s relationship to categories of communal identity results from the necessity of his acknowledgement of Tupinambá beliefs to secure his freedom. He is thus forced to “translate” European categories into fiction for his captors, revealing their precarious foundation, and at the same time destabilizing his own “state of mind.”

In a similar way, Staden also translates Tupinambá culture for his European audience. Perhaps for these reasons, Staden’s “view” of the cannibal is less “strange” than most, and his *True History* has been called “ethnographically accurate” by Whitehead (2008: xlii). Thévet, who most engaged with an “antiquarian” view of the cannibal who eats other humans for alimentary purposes, did not base his conclusions in experience. He was directly and aggressively contradicted by De Léry, who visited the Tupinambá as an observer, more akin to Lévi-Strauss in the twentieth century. Yet De Léry not only stresses the “symbolic” aspects of cannibalism as “vengeance,”—something done to one’s enemy— but also invokes the metaphor of the Eucharist against his Catholic enemies. Staden becomes familiar to Tupinambá rituals from the inside, and so, as Villas Bôas notes, in the *True History*, “cannibalism no longer exclusively delimits a radically strange, monstrous alterity placed at the outskirts of the known world” (2008: 7). Although Staden disagrees with the practice of



anthropophagic ritual, known as *kawewi pepicke* in Tupi, that he claims to have observed (the eating, not the killing, of the enemy, as he states), and it remains strange and offensive to him, he does not “deterritorialize” the cannibal as De Léry does (Lestringant 1977: 80). He portrays the Tupinambá “close-up” to the best capacity of his memory, with all the attendant problems of cross-cultural translation, while somehow maintaining their alterity. As we may recall, these are some of the criteria of truth for Staden’s narrative, which Dryander set forth regarding the Antipodes. We may remember that the cannibal was seen in the twentieth century as a “mark of liberty in the face of colonial oppression,” as Whitehead explains with regard to the Brazilian modernist “antropofagia” movement (2000: 733).<sup>127</sup> In facing death by cannibalism, then, Staden lost his European parameters and had to negotiate new, hybrid modes of self-identification. In a sense, Staden also “cannibalized” European categories of identity not only to survive, but also to live authentically amidst physical hardship and cultural difference.

The cannibal seems to function on several levels simultaneously in Staden’s text. On the one hand, Staden co-existed with Tupinambá anthropophagic ritual, which he could only partially understand as an outsider, even as he observed it numerous times. On the other, the “cannibal” was perhaps the epitome of the imposition of metaphor and the fictive translation of the other to suit the goals and pursuits of Western European imperialism (Cheyfitz 142). The cannibal, besides being a topic of great interest to European readers, was very effective as a political symbol that could have suggested the Papist “tyranny” of Empire. Literally the cover model of the *True History*, the cannibal was described in Europe since antiquity, with

---

<sup>127</sup> Staden also represents the cannibal as a force against political oppression, as Lestringant, Whitehead, and Martel have discussed, in that cannibalism represented the ability to resist European domination and, real or not, served as a strategy “for survival in a violent and transformative period of world history” (Martel 54).

dubious connection to reality, and more often deployed as a metaphor. The word connects sovereignty with alterity, as it was invented by Columbus' confluence of the Native word "Carib" with the Latin "canis" [dog] in his search for the Kingdom of the Great Khan. From the outset, as Cheyfitz argues, the "cannibal" was "cut off from its proper (cultural) meaning in Native American languages" and "becomes a purely political figure in European terms, a figure that tries to erase its own rhetoricity by claiming a proper, or ethnological referent" (42-43). In this way, the act of colonial and imperial translation ruptures the word from its original meaning and context (43). Because of the apparent political deployment of Staden's text, what Cheyfitz calls the "political fiction" of the cannibal can be said to coexist with Staden and Dryander's more ethnographic rendering (143). Yet Staden, who experienced both sides of the "cannibal," having eventually participated in Tupinambá society as a "prophet" and attained kin-status, perhaps could have served to relativize the view of the cannibal, like Montaigne did, if his experience of alterity had not been subsumed under the rubric of "truth" for European "experts" and institutions.

Early in his captivity, Staden's "selves" begin to multiply, as he demonstrates the ability to make predictions and influence the weather for the Tupinambá, through prayer to his God. In a state of despair and mutual misunderstanding, at the Tupinambá's request, Staden prays for a storm to cease to show the "savage heathens, who do not know You, that You, my God, have heard my prayer" (53). This is the beginning of Staden's role as a weather shaman, and later, a prophet among the Tupinambá. Clearly, Staden and the Tupi would have had quite different understanding of this role. Prophecy was one of the most remarkable features of Tupi-Guaraní religion, in which prophets known as "xamãs", or in Tupi, "caraíbas", led mystical migrations in search of the Utopian "Land without Evil" (Pompa 178). They also served an oracular function and revealed the future with regards to war and

health, through the aid of “maracas”, deprecated by the Europeans as idols (190), and a practice which Thévet characterized as witchcraft.

Although such “prophecy” was an autochthonous ritual, European traditions of prophecy also existed. Because of the invaders’ hierarchical insensitivity and projection, this analogous practice resulted in substantial interference. Staden might have observed Tupi practices, but, especially, early in his captivity, he would have a different understanding of “prophecy” than the Tupinambá. Coming from a biblical tradition, the German would have been aware of prophecy as a prediction of calamities or as an explanation of disasters or punishments from God, in an attempt to create a more perfect order among men (178). Prophecy thus related to a history of salvation. For the Tupinambá, moreover, a person’s capacity to prophesy was also the sign of his or her great or exceptional nature (Lévi-Strauss 351). Yet the understanding of Tupinambá prophecy that has been inherited from the sixteenth century texts is more of a hybrid, mutually produced practice (Pompa 179). As such, Staden as “prophet” is neither fully biblical nor Tupi, but something singular and possibly dangerous on both sides of the Atlantic. We must remember, however, that prophecy would not have seemed totally out of place to Staden’s audience, as popular prophecy was also widely practiced in Europe, especially along the religious divides (Niccoli).<sup>128</sup>

Even Montaigne refers to the Tupinambá prophets, and notes their role in the moral economy of their villages: “This prophet declaims to them in public, exhorting them to virtue and their duty”, which consists to “resolution in war, and affection to their wives” (94). Montaigne is notable for recognizing and validating these prophets, even though he does not know “what kind” they might be. He concludes, “Divination is a gift of God, and therefore to abuse it, ought to be a punishable imposture” (95).

---

<sup>128</sup> Additionally, in Spain, as Richard Kagan has shown, prophecy was used “illicitly” in certain circles as political critique of King Philip II. See *Lucrecia’s Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (1995).

Tupinambá prophecy was often attributed to the influence of the devil, as in Thévet's *Singularities*, and De Léry called them "false" prophets, as does Staden. Montaigne acknowledges these risks, as well: "if he fails in his divination [...] he is cut into a thousand pieces [...] and condemned for a false prophet" (95). Even though Montaigne's interpretation may be far from actual Tupinambá practices of prophecy, he shows its centrality, and its potential as a point of comparison between the Old and New Worlds, as well as the moral consequence of its role for both communities (Cheyfitz 146). On both sides of the Atlantic, then, it was risky for Staden to portray himself acting through this "radical" salvation and transformation, as it could easily be rendered heretical or a threat to the Lutheran religion, then under the strict and near-absolute control of the Protestant Princes (Hughes 51).

The rupture from referential meaning indicated by these problems of cross-cultural translation make Staden's transformation into a "prophet" difficult to interpret, especially because we cannot be sure of his understanding of Tupinambá prophecy. Since life writing in Reformation Europe tended to fall into two categories—the lives of the Reformers as agents of the true faith and the lives of the Reformers as heretics (Backus xvi)—the presence of "prophets" in both Christian and Tupinambá religions was problematic for Landgrave Hesse's political deployment of Staden's autobiography. The legal duress under which the Landgrave extracted Staden's account, and Dryander fashioned it, thus subjecting Staden to regulation and "fitting," would have been complicated by these untranslatable, but somehow analogous, practices. Staden's rendering into language and text of his transformation, while under interrogation, recalls the concept of *le sujet-en-procès*, or subject-in-process/on trial, as described by Julia Kristeva. As she explains, the self, or "the

subject of enunciation,”<sup>129</sup> produced by language and the unconscious, is always “in process,” that is, it is continuously being configured and reconfigured in the text, even as it is perpetually “on trial,” as Kristeva’s term suggests: in both French and Spanish, “*procès*” and “*proceso*” refer to a trial. This process disrupts the totalitarian truth, enforced by censorship and law, which attempts to produce a “unitary subject.” Even though a social being is “subject to the law of One (the Name of the Father) which restrains basic drives and establishes the order of social censorship and separation,” as Lacan claimed, for Kristeva this does not speak to the foundations and essential nature of the “subject of enunciation,” or speaking subject (Prud’homme and Légaré 2). In Staden’s case, he is required to provide a homogeneous identity of the faithful Protestant—even as a prophet—before his Prince’s law, but his text reveals his heterogeneity.

These observations regarding the subject-in-process have specific connections to the sixteenth century. As Stephen Greenblatt has claimed, the Renaissance individual was notable for his ability to improvise identity (“self-fashion”) and embody what Greenblatt terms a “mobile sensibility”: to think himself into the place of the other. This echoes Kristeva’s assertion that the subject-in-process comes into being in a “space of mobility,” which she also refers to as “the semiotic chora” (1998:134).<sup>130</sup> The dangerous aspect of the skill of “improvisation of power,” however, is, in Greenblatt’s words, the possible reciprocity of “the violence of fictionalization” whereby Europeans were able to “transform another’s reality into a manipulable fiction,” or reveal “another’s truth as an ideological construct” (1980: 228). If adequate distance was not maintained, this fictionalization of the other could

---

<sup>129</sup> For Kristeva, the “subject of enunciation” an effect of linguistic processes, is constitutive of subjectivity, but, according to John Lechte, this subject does not refer to a “‘concrete,’ ‘singular’ reality outside language” (1990:72).

<sup>130</sup> Kristeva translates Plato’s theory of the chora as “a mobile receptacle of mixing, of contradiction and movement, vital to nature’s functioning before the teleological intervention of God, and corresponding to the mother [...]” (1977: 57)

reciprocally unmoor European ideologies, which, as it turns out, happens to terms like “prophet” and categories of communal identity in Staden’s *True History*. In the same vein, the dynamic subject-in-process effectively subverts unitary law, and puts it, reciprocally, “on trial.” For Staden, the assertion of his selves-in-motion occurs outside of the Empire, in Brazil, thus shown to be a space for “new possibilities of identity formation” (Villas Bôas 2008: 23) beyond the oppressive and unstable conditions of the imperially, and after 1555, locally dominated Province of Hesse.

This schism of Staden’s selves, which defies the demands of truth necessary for the *True History* to function as political discourse, appears in two forms on the level of the text. First, as a condition of autobiographical writing, there is a disjunction between the narrator-on-trial, in 1556, and his textual selves, all under the name of Hans Staden, which appear throughout the *True History*. This disconnect is due not only to position of these selves in the past, but also because of their status *as text*. Second, as I mentioned earlier, the standard European-American travel narrative was structured in three parts: the outbound voyage, encounter with alterity, and return home. As Michel de Certeau has shown in the case of Jean De Léry, this structure involved not only an “oceanic division” but also a psychological “distortion”: after his encounter with another culture and land, the voyager returned to the homeland with a “a part of the world which appeared to be entirely other” (1988: 219). On two levels, then, Staden as narrator is incommensurable with Staden as he appears in the text, even though his Prince demands a unitary “truth” from him on the level of law. Even though autobiographical truth is not externally verifiable, Landgrave Hesse and Dryander both require and provide legal proof—papers, witnesses, testimony—that Staden has faithfully ‘reproduced’ his life experience: first in speech, then as a written text.

Improvisation, for Staden, becomes a matter of survival among his captors.

Upon his arrival in the Tupinambá village, Uwattibi, Staden is thronged with villagers, who beat and tore at his body, his beard, and lay him on the ground, “showing” him how they want to eat him. He finds himself in the middle of a Tupinambá ritual, which must have been disorienting as well as terrifying, given his assumption that they would kill and eat him. Yet the way Staden asserts he dealt with this terror is notable:

The women led me away, some by the arms, some by the rope around my neck, pulling it so tight that I could hardly breathe. While they were dragging me, I was unsure about what they wanted to do with me. I began to think about the suffering which our savior Jesus Christ suffered at the hands of the mean Jews. In this way, I comforted myself [...] (55)

In simple fashion, Staden (as Cabeza de Vaca did in his *Naufragios*) projects himself into the position occupied by Jesus Christ, not only for comfort, but to regain a sense of self-recognition in a situation that otherwise would threaten to erase him completely. This is evident on the surface of his body: the Tupinambá “scrape” off his eyebrows, and while Staden refused to let his beard be cut, this was done a few days later, “with a pair of scissors, which the Frenchmen had given them” (56). His wounded leg, as well, made it almost impossible for him to participate in the ceremonies of the Tupinambá. The terror and vulnerability are overwhelming to him. As Dryander put it, “Every day and hour ... he expected to be killed without mercy and eaten” (5). But, at some level, the markers of his European origins had to be removed for a new, identity as a “prophet” to emerge.

### *Negotiating Identity in Captivity*

At this point, the issue of Staden’s communal identity becomes extremely important, as he is considered an “enemy” destined for sacrifice. He is handed off to

his “owner,” Ipperu Wasu, a Tupinambá “king”<sup>131</sup> who explains to him that the “idols” (*maracá*) prophesied that the Tupinambá would capture a Portuguese. Staden’s response to Ipperu Wasu, as well as his reply, indicate the difficulty in conversing across cultures:

These [idols] have no power and cannot speak. They lie about me being a Portuguese. Rather I belong to the friends of the French, and my native land is called Allemanien. Then they said it was I who lied, for if I was truly the Frenchmen’s friend, what was I then doing among the Portuguese (58).

This is not a trivial objection on the part of the Tupinambá, whose livelihood had been threatened by the Portuguese more than by the French, who at least traded with them. As we know, part of the reason for Staden’s work with the Portuguese had to do with the location of the Spanish/German shipwreck. Clearly, for Staden, national markers had been flexible, yet important, where the pursuit of profit and status were concerned. And when it seemed his life was in danger, fiction seemed most appropriate: “I *stuck to my story* and said that I belonged to the friends of the French, and that they should keep me alive until the Frenchmen arrived and recognized me” (59, my emphasis).

But the Frenchman who arrives is the “indianized” Karwattuware, a Norman trader gone ‘native,’ with whom Staden speaks in Tupi because he is not proficient in French, a problem he explains by claiming he had lived a long time away from France. At first hoping this Christian “Frenchman” would plead his case before the Tupi, Staden begs him to save him from being eaten. Karwattuware’s response is terse: “They want to eat you” (60). He refuses to support Staden, since the “German” was, after all, an arquebusier for the Portuguese—a favorite of the king of Portugal, and thus a rival of France and of the Tupinambá in Brazil. Karwattuware then says in Tupi, “Kill and eat him, the good-for nothing. He is a real Portuguese, your enemy and mine” (60). Staden’s inability to assert the “truth” of his identity to the

---

<sup>131</sup> Staden uses the German word *könig* for king in most cases, suggesting he recognizes an equivalence between Tupinambá and European modes of sovereign power, or he is trying to make the concept comprehensible for a European audience.



Tupinambá, or even to stick to his story provokes him to have another breakdown. He tears off his tattered clothes and flings it at the feet of the Frenchman, imploring, “If I then have to die, why then should I preserve my flesh any longer for others?”

Returning to the hut where he was kept guarded, he screamed the verses of a Lutheran hymn that invoke the eventual trajectory of Staden’s journey, if on a “heavenly” plane: “That in our last moments He may protect us/when we journey homeward, away from this misery” (60).

Staden’s reaction to Karwattuware’s lack of support unfortunately confirms whatever doubts the Tupinambá had: “He is a real Portuguese. Now he screams, he is afraid of death” (61). It is important to note that indigenous prisoners of war among the Tupinambá would boast of their achievements and affront their impending death, rather than demonstrate fear. Staden’s “story” of being a friend of the French, but not German (since the Tupinambá had no experience or alliance with the Germans), was not credible in the first place to the Tupinambá. They could not reconcile why he would work for the Portuguese, who were their staunch enemies, if he were truly allied with France. A young Tupinambá boy knew Staden well, having been rescued from slavery at the hands of a Galician at Bertioğa some three months before Staden’s capture. Although this boy allowed that Staden might be Castilian, it was certain that the Castilians and Portuguese were friends. The German would have to learn to manipulate the Tupinambá’s concept of identity, a process that took several months and was never completely achieved, as the Tupinambá continued to debate his national origin (Villas Bôas 2008: 23). However, he succeeds at stalling his sacrifice through his parallel rise as a prophet, along with his insistence on the “fiction” of being a Frenchman. In fact, the more status he achieves as prophet, the more he is able to manipulate and unmoor European categories of identity. In transforming himself for the Tupinambá, European categories also transform for Staden. Nonetheless, as Villas

Bôas rightly states, he remains unreadable for both cultures, even as he is able to operate in both: “the ambivalence and contingency of the traveler’s identity is constantly reasserted by the way Indians and Mamluks perceive his otherness” (2008: 23).

Early in his captivity, then, despite his captors’ belief that he was Portuguese, Staden continued to tell them that he had French brothers who were coming to rescue him. When the first Portuguese (but German owned) ship from Bertioaga arrived, looking for Staden, he had to find a way to substantiate his claims of being French. His solution is to invent a “brother” among them, one Claudio Miranda (an actual shipmate), “who was also a Frenchman.” However, this time, the brother did not appear, and the Tupi remained unconvinced as to Staden’s being “French.” This uncertainty surrounding Staden’s identity leads the Tupinambá to hold him a special kind of reverence or wariness and they “left him in peace” (71). However, as the case of Konyan Bebe will make clear, Staden claims would become plausible to the Tupinambá insofar as he participates in their society as a prophet.

#### *Conversations with “King” Konyan Bebe*

A very important moment in the parallel “unmooring” of categories of communal identity and Staden’s rise as a prophet occurs in his first meeting with the Tupinambá leader, Konyan Bebe.<sup>132</sup> One of the more illustrious “Antipodes” of Brazil, he appears in the writings of José Anchieta, De Léry, and Thévet. In calling him a “king,” of course, Staden tried to make him legible for his European audience, but the kind of power this Amerindian chief wielded and his political system were

---

<sup>132</sup> “Konyan Bebe” has various acceptable transliterations, including Cunhambebe and Quoniambec or Quoniambegue. I use Konyan Bebe because that was Staden’s particular transliteration.

totally foreign to Staden's readers, and to some degree, to Staden as well, who rejected many aspects of the Tupi worldview he could manage to understand. The captive first met Konyan Bebe in the village of Ariró during an anthropophagic ritual. The frank nature of the conversation between Staden and this member of the Tupinambá "elite" is surprising. It not only furthers the discussion of Staden's national identity, but leads to the German's role as a sort of "political advisor" to the "cannibal." As he is led to the king, Staden passes "some fifteen heads" of their enemies, the Marcaias,<sup>133</sup> set up on posts, and remarks on his anticipation of the meeting: "Now I had heard a lot about this king called Konyan Bebe. He was supposed to be a great man, and also a great tyrant, who ate human flesh" (62). Staden gives an informal portrait of the "king," including a physical description, and an enumeration of his various "adornments," by which the captive concludes he must have been a man of highest standing among the Tupinambá.

Still misidentified as Portuguese, however, Staden perceived himself to be in danger. His strategy for survival seems to be one of flattery, as he enters the 'court' of Konyan Bebe, and speaks to him in Tupi, saying, "Are you Konyan Bebe? Are you still alive? [...] I have heard much about you, that you are such a fierce man" (62). The "king" identifies Staden as his enemy, a Portuguese, but Staden's reply—"I have come to you, but I am not your enemy"—complicates their dialogue from the outset. Yet Konyan Bebe, aware of Staden's profession as arquebusier, wants information about the Tupinambá's enemies, and wonders if this "Portuguese" man ranks among them or not. Staden claims he "had to" shoot at the Tupinambá because "the Portuguese had placed [him] there" (62), which the reader knows to be false. The "king" questions Staden as if he were a spy, but also tries to trap him in his lies about nationality: "Then he said he had already helped to capture and eat five Portuguese

---

<sup>133</sup>The Marcaia were enemies of the Tupinambá (and thus, also of the French).

who had all said they were Frenchmen, and had lied about this.” At this point, Staden sinks even lower into despair, and he “abandoned all hopes of life and commended [himself] to God” (62).

As the conversation continued, quick-witted Staden deflected Konyan Bebe’s focus on the Portuguese by betraying the plans of the Tupiniquins to attack the Tupinambá, information he must have been privy to as a member of the defense force of Bertioga. Thus acting as an apparent war-prophet to Konyan Bebe, he hoped to save himself. Although this information was appealing to the “king,” he instead continued to participate in the festive environment and mocked his prisoner, indicating Staden had not yet achieved any status with his advice. The drunken Konyan Bebe and his son tied up Staden and taunted him: “They untied my legs again and then began to walk round me, grabbing at my flesh. One of them said that the skin on my head was his; another claimed that the thigh was his. After this I had to sing for them” (63). The threat of physical fragmentation at the hands of the “cannibal king” not only invokes images of dissolution of the self but also reinforces the fragility of Staden’s identity, as remembered and re-enacted at this point in his autobiography.

The fact that Staden’s prediction comes true, and the Tupiniquins attack, reinforced the Tupinambá belief that Staden possessed gifts of prophecy. He made more predictions regarding the movements of enemy tribes and became regarded as a formidable adviser. Staden is careful, in his commentary on this role, to qualify this as God’s intervention in his life, to show his favor, but his facility in “things Savage” suggests his partial negation, albeit out of necessity, of a Christian framework. He claimed, however, that the Tupinambá recognized his ‘foreign’ God, and His power. Later in Staden’s captivity, once his role as prophet had stabilized, Konyan Bebe asked the German to “take heed” of his dreams to make a war prophecy. The leader was not put off by Staden’s stated distrust of dreams, and simply replied, “you should

nonetheless work things out with your God, so that we capture enemies” (86).

At the same time, Staden pursued other means of gaining status among the Tupinambá. They were greatly unsettled, for example, by his predictions regarding the “anger” of the moon at his captors for eating human flesh, after which an epidemic of illness killed several family members of Staden’s owner. The deaths that occurred following his prophecy were so numerous that even the suggestion that Staden’s God could be responsible for them out of “revenge” for the Tupinambá’s treatment of him and their consumption of human flesh, terrifies the villagers. After the epidemic illness, in which Staden seems to have manipulated the Tupinambá’s cosmology for his own purposes, his capacity for improvisation of identity had reached the point where he was no longer considered for sacrifice. On the contrary, he had attained kin-status: “The old women in various huts, who had done great harm to me, and threatening to eat me, now called me Scheraeire, which means: my son” (71). This is tied, however, to his ambiguous identity as well, since the Tupinambá don’t know *who* he is: “We understand now that you cannot be a Portuguese,” his captors say to him, because “their God never got as angry as yours.” As occurred in the case of Cabeza de Vaca among the Amerindians of the Gulf Coast, such ambiguity at times terrifies Staden’s captors. His identity remains unstable for the Tupinambá: “Neither did they know what to do with me, nor whether I was a Portuguese or a Frenchman. They said I had a red beard like the Frenchmen” (71). Although no longer a certain enemy, he remains captive, as he was captured in enemy territory.

His status as prophet, however, seems to have been well established, becoming most explicit in Chapter 42, where Staden writes that “the savages were very favorably disposed towards me, since I had predicted that they would have luck when the enemy would encounter us. Since it had now turned out to be true, they said I was a better prophet than their Maraka” (89). It is worthwhile to explain here what

the “Maraka” were. A kind of gourd used by males and also pajé, or soothsayers, the *maracá* gave the Tupinambá prophets the power to prophesy, although it seemed (to observers) that this speech was transmitted through the *maracá* (Clastres 11). Staden takes these, notably, to be their gods (125). While Staden conveys his pleasure at his role and success as a kind of *maracá*, he also admits on several occasions that he is unsure how the Tupinambá perceive him and remains in fear for his life during nearly the entire nine months of captivity. The role of prophet, however, seems to be the most important one to him, as it allows him credibility and legibility among his captors, while permitting Staden to represent his encounter with alterity to his prince, Landgrave Philip of Hesse, as “domesticated” by signs and wonders from God. He can translate his status as prophet into the “Lutheran” faith (and perhaps betray its authenticity, for authority’s sake) and thus weave a tale of salvation, explaining why he was able to survive, while several other Christians, all Catholics, perished among the Tupinambá.

Even though Staden would have to reassert his “unitary” identity as Hessian in order to write a “true” history, at this point in his history it is evident that he was transculturated to some degree, as Villas Bôas (2005) and Martel (2007) both affirm. This can even be noticed in some of the woodcut prints from later chapters, such as number 26, “Meyen Bipe War camp,” where it can be difficult to distinguish Staden from the other Tupinambá (Villas Bôas 2005: 206). Villas Bôas sums this up as follows: “oriented as it is towards the traveler’s return, the overriding narrative implied that the traveler is not a cross-over, but a home-comer. This in no way diminishes the claim that the traveler has contingently become [...] Tupinambá” (207). Although Whitehead in his introduction to his edition of the *True History* (2008) states that Staden did not become assimilated, in a note he admits that the

German appears to have taken his role among the Tupinambá quite seriously: “he might have been transculturated to some degree” (n. 132: 179).

How to characterize this transformation, however, proves more difficult, but signals the importance of reading Staden’s tale through his destabilization of cultural “categories.” Although Villas Bôas calls Staden a “German Mamluk,” in reference to his fluency in both Christian and “savage” ways, his own comments to the Brazilian Mamelukes do not support this means of identifying the narrator. In August of 1554, already integrated as a slave into Tupinambá society, Staden accompanied Konyan Bebe on a war expedition. There he encountered the two Mamelukes from Bertioaga, who had been taken captive for sacrifice. In counseling the brothers to accept their fate, Staden revealed his belief that he had been protected by God among the Tupinambá. He was perturbed by the brothers’ distress at their impending sacrifice: “Then I continued to say that, properly speaking, this ought to affect me more than them: I come from foreign lands and am not accustomed to the dreadful acts of these people. You have always been here in these lands; you have been born and raised here” (89). Although he is reasonably conversant in Tupi practices and customs, Staden retains his German mores. At the same time, he is no longer “German,” at least in Brazil, which is made apparent as he unmoors and fictionalized his former identity once and for all, to secure his escape.

*“Home”-ward Bound: The Frenchman’s Voyage*

Chapter 40 features the arrival of the *Maria Belleite*, from Dieppe, France, to trade at Staden’s village. The Tupinambá would not release Staden to them: “They said no, these are not your real friends. For those who arrived with the boat would have surely given you a shirt, since you walk around naked; but they do not care about

you at all (which was true)” (82). In desperation, still fearing for his life at some level, Staden attempts escape by swimming out to the ship. Yet when he arrives there, with the whole village at his heels, and tries to climb in the ship, “the Frenchmen pushed me away, for they thought that if they took me along without the consent of the savages these might rise against them and become their enemies.” The importance of this episode is suggested by the fact that it is depicted in one of the woodcut prints (83). In other words, the Frenchmen wanted to ensure conditions for continued mercantilist colonization in Brazil, and Staden was a disruptive force in their plans.

Staden continues to successfully participate in the life of the Tupinambá village, assisting with military campaigns and rebuilding burned villages. Following nearly nine months as a prisoner, warrior, shaman, healer, and hunter, he is given away to another village, Taquartacu-tiba, where he becomes the “son” of a king, Abati-Poçanga, and achieves even more kin-status: “The king called me his son, and I went hunting with his sons.” But, even if we consider that this kin bond is insubstantial to Staden, he shows himself equally equipped to vacate the meaning from European “kin” terms, which of course were not equivalent to those of the Tupi. When another French ship arrives before expected in Niterói, Staden tells the Tupinambá “to bring [him] there, for this might be [his] brother’s ship” (97). This French ship, the *Catherine de Vatteville*, is the scene for the culmination of his fictional identity, as the Captain and crew are in fact prepared to ransom Staden. The Captain of the ship sends a contingent of Tupinambá kings from another village, and French crewmembers to talk to Staden’s captors. The Frenchmen negotiate to leave Staden, whom they claim is their brother, in Brazil for another year, in exchange for Brazil wood and pepper that he will help to gather. Staden and his Tupinambá kin then board the ship and, in the meantime, Staden and the ship's Captain plan how they will deceive his Tupinambá “father” in order that his French “brothers” would be able to



ransom him and take him “home.” Yet, at the same time, Staden also states that his Tupinambá ‘father’ “had his mind set on taking him home” (98). One wonders, which of these habitats or cultures did Staden consider home, or had this word taken on multiple meanings for him? This double reference reveals how Staden, to some degree, had become a part Europe’s “Antipodes.” It is, however, the return to his home in Hesse that takes place, and upon which Staden’s “self,” as it appears in print, is predicated. The plan is described as follows:

We had arranged between us that some ten crewmen, who more or less resembled me, should now gather together and pretend to be my brothers, who wanted to take me home. This resolve was presented to them: these brothers of mine would on no account allow me to return on land with the savages. They wanted me to return home, for my father longed to see me once more before he died (98).

The reader knows this to be an outright lie, as one of Dryander’s “reasons” to validate the truth of Staden’s account was that the professor knew Staden’s father well—there is no indication that Staden’s father had passed away. Nevertheless, such an assertion of a French father not only relativizes Dryander’s claims, but also destabilizes his claims of truth. Yet it is still *another* “father” who does not wish to see Staden depart with the French:

I told the king, my master [Abati-Poçanga] that I very much wanted to return with him, but that, as he could see, my brothers would not allow me to do so. Then he began to shout all over the ship, saying that if they really wanted to take me away, I then had to return with the first ship, for he looked upon me as his son, and was very angry with those from Uwattibi, who had wanted to eat me (98).

Staden further related that “one of his wives who was with him on the ship lamented over me, according to their custom, and I also cried as they usually do” (99). These tears, even if culturally performative, evoke Staden’s cultural connection to his Tupi kin, whom he would nonetheless leave behind forever, a scene only revived through these “contours” of memory, fit to be understood by the “experts.”

“Thus the Almighty Lord,” relates Staden in recollection of his return to Europe, “saved me from the hands of the tyrants” (99). Still, the “prophet” and former captive is perhaps in more danger by being onboard the *Catherine de Vatteville*, as he reenters the European political arena, than he was at Taquartacu-tiba: pulling out of port, the ship encounters the small Portuguese ship that tried to ransom Staden earlier in the narrative—a ship owned by a German agent, Peter Rösel—and the ensuing firefight nearly “mortally” wounds him, and kills several Frenchmen. By this point, it was October 1544, and his return (unlike De Léry’s, which was marked by storms) was full of “visible wonders,” which Staden attributed to God. Such wonders were part of the hagiographic narrative tradition in Germany that would intensify his status as prophet, which he carried over to Europe (TenHuisen 223). In February, 1555, the *Catherine de Vatteville* arrives at Honfleur, in Normandy. After the ship’s Captain assists Staden in obtaining his passport in the presence of the “supreme commander” and Admiral of Normandy, Staden proceeds to Dieppe, France.

Staden’s capacity to act as prophet, “a better prophet than [the Tupinambás’] Maraka” as we will recall (89), had developed to such a point that it clearly transformed him. We may judge this by his treatment of the French relatives of the crew of the *Maria Bellete* in Dieppe, the ship which earlier refused to ransom Staden and was overdue to arrive in France. These family members approach him for news of their loved ones and Staden replies to them, “I have indeed seen them. They are godless people on board the ship [...] I could not care less, where they were” (102). Replaying almost word for word the content of Chapter 40, he explains to the families of these people how the crew had left him among the Tupinambá. He then exclaims, “Let them come when they want; *I will be a prophet unto you*: God will not leave such

mercilessness and tyranny, as they showed to me in these lands [...] unpunished” (102, my emphasis). Staden’s statement does not merely reveal a casual choice of words: he both invokes the political vocabulary of tyranny, and retrieves his “Tupinambá” his identity as “prophet.” This further reveals the fiction of Staden’s French brothers as having been nothing more than words within a greater strategy; his allegiance was to his own safety, not to any supposed “countrymen.” In addition, Whitehead notes that De Léry made use of the symbol of the “cannibal” to condemn European tyrants, as did Montaigne to criticize the French and the Spanish.

Staden’s description of the *Maria Belleste*’s refusal to take him onboard as “tyranny” seems exaggerated. Even though it is clear that he refers to the French here, it doesn’t fully ring true, even though the German provinces and the Holy Roman Empire had a long history of war with France. Before the Schmalkaldic War, the League and the French did not manage to create an alliance against Charles V, but it would be difficult to characterize the French behavior in Europe, or in Brazil, as “tyranny,” except towards the Tupinambá. Perhaps this cry of Staden’s might become more meaningful if we consider that his identity as French was a sign of the reach of imperial conflict and of the violence wrought on individual lives caught in their crossfires. It would have been more appropriate, from the Schmalkaldic League’s perspective, to cast Charles V as a tyrant, and this could have been a possible resonance in Staden’s text. In any case, sovereign power, whether concentrated in the Emperor or the Landgrave, created artificial rifts and divides, and forced the dynamic subject into an unequivocal “truth,” from which no dissent or deviance was possible. This, indeed, was “tyranny.”

*“The world is not closed”: Concluding Thoughts*

As we know, in 1555, Hans Staden returned to Hesse with his “passport,” presented to the Landgrave as proof of his identity and travels: the circle of his journey closed tight. Staden’s “Concluding Address,” at the end of Part II of the *True History*, however, seems to indicate this closed circle as an aperture: an opening towards something else. For it is here that Staden addresses his reader, rather than Landgrave Philip. Staden alerts his reader that his “prophecies” were meant to exemplify his piety, but also his immersion in an “alien” New World: “I am neither the first, nor shall I be the last, who experiences such voyages and becomes familiar with strange lands and peoples” (144). He also acknowledges that this experience has transformed him, indelibly: “But that he, who has stood face to face with death, should be in the same state of mind as those, who view it from afar or who hear about it, is not to be expected.” In other words, the reader, confronting Staden’s trauma through the printed material of the book, cannot truly comprehend his experience: Staden, framed by institutional and editorial demands, must provide his audience with a suitable and “authorized” narrative, one of piety.

After listing his “witnesses” that could corroborate his testimony, Staden makes a startling and almost aggressive offer to the reader: whoever is not satisfied with his account should “undertake the journey himself” (145). He elaborates, in regard to his reader: “I have given him information enough; let him follow the tracks. The world is not closed to one whom God assists.” The world is open, identity is open, but the book of our lives would be too “thick” to print if we didn’t subject it to some “fitting.” That process of fitting, however, was also often violent, oppressive, and even occasion to face death. In tracing Staden’s circular journey, from Hesse at war to Hesse as a triumphant territorial State, the *True History* reveals the effects of

the Imperial conflicts surrounding the Reformation on individual and collective identity. Staden proved his ability to transcend national markers, yet in the end he still depends on these categories—the “French” prophet still needed a passport to return home to Hesse. As Stephen Greenblatt affirms, in the individual’s improvisation of power, paired with the telling of one’s life history as a public demand, “the truth itself is radically unstable and yet constantly stabilized” (1980: 254). Staden’s history is “true” only inasmuch as his subject position is never fixed, and never resolved. Landgrave Hesse’s demand of unitary, and legal report of subjectivity from Staden, in service of the Hessian political narrative, was in direct conflict with the nature of the gunner’s transatlantic, cross-cultural experience, as well as with the problems inherent to autobiographical writing.

## CONCLUSION

The four chapters of this dissertation have ranged over the vast diversity of territories and subjects ruled by Charles V in the period 1545-1557, in an attempt to show the ways in which life writing about outlaws was engaged with, and had a stake in, the Spanish Empire's political policies, as well as in its modes of self-narration. These life histories were not purely subversive or negative; rather, they placed the sovereign inexorably *in relation* to the outlaw, and unofficial history in relation to Charles V's own *historia pro persona*. In the interests of proposing the "outlaw" as a character or category for literary analysis in the sixteenth-century Spanish Empire, then, I have explored texts which illustrate a variety of possibilities for life writing as political critique within the Empire. Written in keeping with the principles of Humanist historiography, Gómara's "parallel lives" of Barbarossa and Cortés critiqued Charles V's Mediterranean and colonial policies, and offered a new concept of the *hombre ilustre* in the interests of furthering Spanish expansion and glory. By invoking both types of life writing known as commentaries and the *miroir du prince*, Cabeza de Vaca's *Comentarios* evaded the constraints of Charles V's legal system to restore his own reputation as *adelantado* of Río de la Plata, and indicated the limitations of "the language of law" for the representation of sovereign rule in Spain's American colonies. In turn, Hans Staden's *True History*, an autobiographical travel history, detailed the transformation of the German gunner among Tupinambá "cannibals" into a self-declared prophet of a different "state of mind." His resulting life history defied the symbolism and categorization necessary for his text to function as Reformation propaganda against Charles V, in the service of Staden's Prince, Landgrave Philip of Hesse.

One could productively analyze other sixteenth-century and even seventeenth-

century biographies and autobiographies written in the Spanish Empire through the lens of the outlaw. Indeed, it might be said that, beginning with the Cid, Spanish national identity and practices of sovereignty have, in a sense, depended on outlaws for their articulation and definition.<sup>134</sup> Life writing is, nonetheless, often overlooked for its capacity for political critique —lost, as it were, between history and fiction. Yet, as I have aimed to show in this dissertation, this subgenre of historiography made significant contributions to the creative imaginings of Spanish communal identity and good government. Let us recall that, even though the Renaissance may be characterized as the period during which the individual was discovered, as Jacob Burckhardt famously claimed, it was also a time of unthinkable violence and human suffering in the Spanish Empire, which placed the lives of many such individuals in great danger. The Renaissance marked Spain's achievement of political glory (with dreams of even greater grandeur) as well as its Golden Age of cultural production. Instead of “losing” life writing between history and fiction, then, we may instead appreciate the ways in which it bridged the gap between polemical historiography (such as the important writings of Las Casas) and the brilliant literary productions of the sixteenth-century, which culminated in the passionate, heterodox fictions of Cervantes. Gómara, Cabeza de Vaca, and Staden, among others, vividly represented a variety of lives that State-sponsored official history would otherwise have overlooked.

The four texts I have analyzed in this dissertation, then, suggest that both biography and autobiography, by opening up a space for the representation of a variety of individual identities, were effective means to display and contest the constitution of the Spanish State and Empire in its early stages of modernization. Although life

---

<sup>134</sup> I am grateful to Professor Simone Pinet for pointing this out to me in a comment to my presentation at the Romance Studies Conference at Cornell University in February 2008.

writing about outlaws still had to negotiate around the demands of the Spanish legal system, which held strict control over historiography, these works' treatment of sovereignty and law gave them the potential to influence policy and what was thought of as legitimate. As we know, for Charles V, *historia pro persona* held special importance, both for his own reputation and for his desire to unify and expand the Holy Roman Empire. As such, historians and writers who chose this same medium to critique the sovereign had the capacity to challenge the Emperor more directly and provide a more accurate and nuanced depiction of the commonwealth—on which Charles V, according to sixteenth-century political theorist Francisco de Vitoria, depended for his power and law-making ability (Pagden 1991: xix).

The histories of lives outside-the-law revealed not only the heterogeneity of this Spanish “commonwealth,” but also that of the newly “opened” world: a way in which both Cabeza de Vaca and Staden described the transatlantic Habsburg Empire. This openness was, as well, indicative of a certain instability of European ideas and ideals. As Montaigne wrote in his essay, “Of Coaches”: “Our world has lately discovered another (and who will assure us that it is the last of its brothers, since the Dæmons, the Sybils, and we ourselves have been ignorant of this till now?)” (440). The works of life writing I have analyzed confronted this possibility of perhaps infinite iterations of alterity, whether Tupinambá, Aztec, Guaraní, or Turk, and proposed alternative political models and methods of rule for a changing society, along with new imperial heroes. These transatlantic histories fashioned themselves as vessels towards a more truthful imperial self-portrait, undertaking perilous passages in their exploration of both the known and unknown threats to imperial ambition (Blackmore xxi). Indeed, rather than merely reflecting Charles V's dream for *monarchia universalis*, these authors' versions of Empire were more akin to “a picture covered with countless broken mirrors in which the same fracture is reflected (half



this, half that),” as De Certeau wrote about sixteenth-century ethnologies of the Americas (1988: 219). As such, Charles V, gazing into the specular words of unofficial *historia pro persona*, would not have seen his just his *own* portrait but also something else: half-sovereign, half-outlaw.

In conclusion, I would like to recall the words of Fernán Pérez de Guzmán (1370-1460), best known for his *Generaciones y semblanzas*, the popular collection of portraits of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Spanish sovereigns and noblemen. In his preface to this foundational work of Spanish life writing, one of his chief recommendations was that a historical text “non sea publicada biviendo el rey o príncipe en cuyo tiempo y señorío se hordena, porque el estoriador sea libre para escriuir la verdad sin temor” [should not be published during the lifetime of the king or prince during whose reign and under whose rule it takes place, so that the historian may be free to write the truth without fear] (6). The historians of outlaws that I have studied in this dissertation, however, dared to publish their works in Charles V’s lifetime, thus finding freedom in another way: by making *truth* their ultimate sovereign. In taking the risk of writing lives outside-the-law, these authors not only innovated historiography but also spoke to the precarious status of Charles V’s apparently hegemonic and homogeneous institutions and policies. In effect, the four texts I analyze in this study seem to exceed Pérez de Guzmán’s cautionary advice, instead favoring Pedro Rhua’s philosophy, which I explored in Chapter 1: the good historian must write as if he were without a country, without a king, and without any law whatsoever.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acton, Lord John. *The Cambridge Modern History. Vol 2: The Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907.
- Adorno, Rolena. "The Negotiation of Fear in Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*". *Representations*, No. 33, Special Issue: The New World (Winter, 1991): 163-199
- . *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- . "Searching for a Heroic Conception." In *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986: 36-56.
- Adorno, Rolena and Patrick C. Pautz. *Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: his account, his life, and the expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Alfonso X, King of Castile and Leon. *Siete Partidas*. 5 vols. Trans. Samuel Parsons Scott. Ed. Robert Burns. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- . *Setenario*. Ed. Kenneth Vanderford. Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1984.
- Alfred, Taiaiake. "Sovereignty". in *Sovereignty Matters*, ed. Joanne Barker. University of Nebraska Press, 2005: 33-50.
- Allen, Benjamin Mark. *Naked and Alone in a Strange New World: Early Modern Captivity and its Mythos in Ibero-American Consciousness*. Diss. University of Texas, 2008.
- Alvar, Alfredo. "La historia, los historiadores, y el Rey en la España del humanismo". *Imágenes históricas de Felipe II*. Spain: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2000: 217-254.
- Anderson, Judith H. *Biographical Truth*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Arens, William. *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979.

- Ávila y Zuñiga, Luis de. *Comentario de la guerra de Alemania hecha por Carlos V en el año 1546 y 1547*. (1548) Madrid: Francisco Xavier García, 1767.
- Backus, Irena Dorota. *Life Writing in Reformation Europe*. Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2008.
- Bataillon, Marcel. "Hernán Cortés: autor prohibido." *Libro jubilar de Alfonso Reyes*. Mexico: UNAM, 1959.
- Blackmore, Josiah. *Manifest perdition: Shipwreck Narrative and the Disruption of Empire*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Bodin, Jean. *On sovereignty: four chapters from the six books of the commonwealth*. Ed. and trans. Julian H. Franklin. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Boruchoff, David A. "The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca (review)". *Early American Literature*, 39: 2 (2004): 385-393.
- Brady, Thomas A. *Communities, Politics, and Reformation in early modern Europe*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1998.
- . "Early Modern Germany in the Encyclopedia of German History. Part 3: Politics and Religion". *Central European History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1998): 229-256.
- . *Protestant Politics: Jacob Sturm (1489-1553) and the German Reformation*. Boston: Humanities Press International, 1995.
- Brantôme, Pierre de Bourdeilles, Abbé et seigneur de. *Oeuvres complètes de Pierre de Bourdeilles, Abbé et seigneur de*. Ed. Prosper Mérimée. Paris: P. Janet, 1858.
- Braudel, Fernand. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Trans. Siân Reynolds. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- Breitweiser, Mitchell Robert. *American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning: Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
- Brennan, Michael. "The texts of Peter Martyr's *De orbe novo decades* (1504-1628): A response to Andrew Hadfield." *Connotations* 6, no. 2 (1996-97): 227-45.
- Bunes Ibarra, Miguel Ángel de. *Los Barbarroja: corsarios del Mediterráneo*. Madrid: Alderabán, 2004.

- . “Cortés y los hermanos Barbarrojas, vidas paralelas en los escritos de Francisco López de Gómara”. *Revista de Indias*, XLVII 181 (1987): 901-906.
- . “El descubrimiento de América y la conquista del Norte de Africa: dos empresas paralelas en la Edad moderna” *Revista de Indias*, XLV 175 (1985): 225-33.
- . “Lo americano y lo africano en las crónicas de Indias: algunos ejemplos” *Lecturas y ediciones de crónicas de Indias: Una propuesta interdisciplinaria*. Eds. Ignacio Arellano and Fermín del Pino. Navarra: Iberoamericana, 2004. 159-174.
- Burke, Peter. “The Renaissance, Individualism, and the Portrait.” *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1995): 393-400.
- Cabrera de Córdoba, Luis. *De Historia para entenderla y escribirla*. 1611. Ed. Santiago Montero Díaz. Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1948.
- Carman, Glen. *Rhetorical Conquests*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2006.
- Certeau, Michel de. *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- . *The Writing of History*. Trans. Tom Conley. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Cheyfitz, Eric. *The Poetics of Imperialism*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.
- Cicero, M. Tullius. *On the Ideal Orator (De oratore)*. Trans. James M. May and Jacob Wisse. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Clastres, Hélène. *The Land-without-Evil: Tupí-Guaraní prophetism*. Trans. Jacqueline Brovender. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Codoñer Merino, Carmen. “Tres cronistas reales: Alfonso de Palencia, Antonio de Nebrija y Lucio Marineo Sículo.” *La corónica*, 37, no. 1 (2008): 111-143.
- Corominas, Joan. *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico*. Madrid: Gredos, 1980.
- Covarrubias Horozco, Sebastián de. *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*. Eds. Ignacio Arellano and Rafael Zafra. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006.
- Delogu, Daisy. *Theorizing the Ideal Sovereign: The Rise of the French Vernacular Royal Biography*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

- De Man, Paul. "Autobiography as Defacement." *MNL* 94: 919-930.
- Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. 4th ed., 2 vols. Madrid: Historia 16, 1988.
- Domínguez, Luis L. *The Conquest of the River Plate: (1535-1555)*. Introduction. London: Hakluyt Society, 1891.
- Dowling, John "The Fatal Triangle: Don Carlos, King Philip, and Elizabeth of Valois in Literature and Opera" in *The Hispanic Connection: Spanish and Spanish-American Literature in the Arts of the World*. Ed. Zenia Sacks DaSilva. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004: 235-246.
- Dryander, Johannes. *Anatomia hoc est[...]* Marburg, 1537.
- Dubois, Claude-Gilbert and Monique Briand-Walker. "Problems of "Representation" in the Sixteenth Century" *Poetics Today*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1984): 461-478.
- Elliott, John Huxtable. "Cortés, Velázquez, and Charles V." *Letters from Mexico*. By Hernán Cortés. Trans. and Ed. Anthony Pagden. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971: xi-xxxvii.
- . *Imperial Spain: 1469-1716*. London: Penguin, 2002.
- . "The Mental World of Hernán Cortés." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 17 (1967): 41-58.
- Elton, Geoffrey Rudolph, ed. *The New Cambridge Modern History: The Reformation, 1520-1559*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 12 vols. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995.
- Enenkel, Karl, Betsy de Jong-Crane, and Peter Liebrechts, eds. *Modelling the Individual: Biography and Portrait in the Renaissance*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998.
- Erasmus, Desiderius. *The Education of a Christian Prince (Institutio principis Christiani)*. Intro. and Trans. Lester Kruger Born. New York, Octagon Books, 1965.
- . *In Praise of Folly*. New York: Cosimo Books, 2007.
- Feijoo, Ramiro. *Corsarios berberiscos: Españoles contra renegados*. Barcelona: Belacqva/Carroggio, 2003.
- Fernández López, Jorge. "Rhetorical Theory in Sixteenth-Century Spain: A Critical Survey" *Rhetorica*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Spring, 2002): 133-148.

- Frankl, Victor. "Imperio particular e imperio universal en las cartas de relación de Hernán Cortés." *Theories of Empire, 1450-1800*. Ed. David Armitage. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998.
- Forsyth, Donald W. "Three Cheers for Hans Staden: The Case for Brazilian Cannibalism." *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 3., no. 1 (1985): 17-36.
- Foucault, Michel. *"Society must be defended": lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*. Trans. David Macey. Eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Friede, Juan. "La censura estatal y la historiografía americana" in *Descubrimiento y conquista del Nuevo Reino de Granada*. Ed. Luis Martínez Delgado. 23 vols. Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Historia, 1965, II: 290-330.
- Fuchs, Barbara. *Passing for Spain: Cervantes and the Fictions of Identity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Gandía, Enrique de. *Historia de la conquista del Río de la Plata y del Paraguay; los gobiernos de don Pedro de Mendoza, Alvar Núñez y Domingo de Irala*. Buenos Aires: A. García Santos, 1932.
- Ganson, Barbara. *The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Garavaglia, Juan Carlos. "The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: The La Plata Basin (1535-1650)" in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas: Vol. 3 South America*. Part 2. Eds. Frank Solomon and Stuart Schwartz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 1-58.
- García Cárcel, Ricardo, ed. *La construcción de las historias de España*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2004.
- Garcés, María Antonia. *Cervantes en Argel: Historia de un cautivo*. Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 2005.
- . *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive's Tale*. Nashville. Vanderbilt University Press, 2002.
- Gaylord, Mary. "Spain's Renaissance Conquests and the Retroping of Identity." *Journal of Hispanic Philology* 16 (1992): 125-36.
- Giovio, Paolo. *Commentario de le cose de' Turchi*. 1531.
- . *Delle historie del suo tempo*, ii, Venice, 1557.

- Goodwin, Robert T.C. "The Life of Cabeza de Vaca: A brief biography." *Projects:Discoveries*. <[http://www.ems.kcl.ac.uk/content/proj/disc/cab/bio\\_cabeza.html](http://www.ems.kcl.ac.uk/content/proj/disc/cab/bio_cabeza.html)>. 7 November 2009.
- González Echevarría, Roberto. *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- . *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Groebner, Valentin. *Who are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe*. Trans. Mark Kyburz. Zone Books, 2007.
- Hanke, Lewis. *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World*. 1959. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1970.
- Hess, Andrew C. *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth Century Ibero-African Frontier*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Hierro, Francisco del. *Diccionario de autoridades*. 1726-1739. Ed. Real Academia Española. Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1964.
- Hughes, Michael. *Early Modern Germany: 1477-1806*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.
- Hulme, Peter. *Colonial Encounters : Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*. London, New York: Methuen, 1986.
- Iglesia, Ramón. *Cronistas e historiadores de la Conquista de México*. México: El Colegio de México, 1942.
- Isom-Verhaaren, Christine. "'Barbarossa and His Army Who Came to Succor All of Us': Ottoman and French Views of Their Joint Campaign of 1543–1544". *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Summer 2007): 396-425.
- Jiménez, Nora Edith. *Francisco López de Gómara: Escribir historias en tiempos de Carlos V*. Zamora, México: Colegio de Michoacán/INAH, 2001.
- Johnson, Carina L. "Some Peculiarities of Empire in the Early Modern Era." in *Politics and Reformations: Communities, Politics, Nations, and Empires*. Ed. Christopher Ocker. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2007.
- Kagan, Richard L. *Clio and the Crown: The Politics of History in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*. John Hopkins University Press, 2009.

- . “Clio and the Crown: Writing History in Habsburg Spain”. *Spain, Europe and the Atlantic World*. Ed. Richard L. Kagan and Geoffrey Parker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- . “Los cronistas del emperador” in *Carolus V Imperator*. Ed. Pedro Navascués Palacio, Barcelona : Lunwerg Editores, 1999: 183-212.
- . *Lucrecia’s Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Kagan, Richard L. and Abigail Dyer. *Inquisitorial Inquiries*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Kohut, Karl. “Las primeras crónicas de Indias y la teoría historiográfica.” *Colonial Latin American Review*, 18, no. 2 (2009): 153-187.
- Kraus, Christina Shuttleworth. “Historiography and Biography” in *A Companion to Latin Literature*. Ed. Stephen J. Harrison. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005: 241-256.
- . “Introduction” in *The Classical Commentary: Histories, Practices, Theory*. Eds. Roy K. Gibson and Christina Shuttleworth Kraus. Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2002.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- . “The Subject-in-Process.” in *The Tel Quel Reader*. Eds. Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack. London and New York: Routledge, 1998: 133-180.
- Lafaye, Jacques. *Sangrientas fiestas del renacimiento*. Mexico: FCE, 1999.
- Las Casas, Bartolomé de. *Historia de las Indias*. 3 vols. Ed. Miguel Angel Medina. Madrid: Alianza, 1994.
- Laube, Daniela. “The Stylistic Development of German Book Illustration, 1460-1511” in *A Heavenly Craft: The Woodcut in Early Printed Books*. Ed. Daniel De Simone. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 2004: 47-71.
- Lechte, John. *Julia Kristeva*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- León-Portilla, Miguel. “Hernán Cortés, primera biografía: La obra de Lucio Marineo Sículo, 1530”. *Historia 16*, 108 (1985): 95-104.
- Le Goff, Jacques. *History and Memory*. Trans. Steven Rendell and Elizabeth Claman. Columbia University Press, 1996.



- Léry, Jean de. *History of a voyage to the land of Brazil, otherwise called America*. Trans. Janet Whatley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Lestringant, Frank. *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*. Trans. Rosemary Morris. Berkeley, California: The University of California Press, 1997.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. London: Hutchinson and Company, 1961.
- Lezra, Jacques. “‘La mora encantada’: Covarrubias in the soul of Spain”. *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2000): 5-27.
- Loesberg, Johnathan. “Narratives of Authority: Cortés, Gómara, Díaz.” *Prose Studies* 6 (1983): 239-263.
- López de Gómara, Francisco. *Annals of the Emperador Charles V*, ed and trans. Roger Bigelow Merriman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912.
- . “Crónica de los muy nombrados Omiche y Haradin Barbarrojas,” *Memorial histórico español: Colección de documentos, opúsculos y antigüedades que publica la Real Academia de Historia*, 1853: 327-440.
- . *Crónica de los corsarios Barbarroja*. Ediciones Polifemo, 1989.
- . *Guerras de mar del Emperador Carlos V*. Eds. and introduction Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra and Nora Edith Jiménez. Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2000.
- . *Historia de los Barbarrojas de Argel: Manuscrito del Siglo XVI*. Málaga: Editorial Algazara, 2002.
- . *Historia de la conquista de México*. ed Jorge Gurria Lacroix. Caracas: Ayacucho, 1979.
- . *Historia general de las Indias y Vida de Hernán Cortés*. ed. Jorge Gurria Lacroix. Caracas: Ayacucho, 1979.
- Loureiro, Angel. *The Ethics of Autobiography: Replacing the Subject in Modern Spain*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000.
- Lupher, David. *Romans in a New World*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.
- Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Trans. and Ed. Russell Price. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

- Manuel, Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel. *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Maravall, José Antonio. *Carlos V y el pensamiento político del Renacimiento*. Madrid: Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1999.
- . *Estado moderno y mentalidad social (siglos xv-xvii)*. Madrid: Alianza, 1972.
- . *Estudios de historia del pensamiento español: Serie segunda: La época del Renacimiento*. Madrid: Ediciones cultura hispánica, 1984.
- . *Teoría del estado en España en el siglo XVII*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1997.
- Marineo Sículo, Lucio. *De rebus Hispaniae memorabilibus*. Alcalá, 1530.
- Martel, H.E. "Hans Staden's Captive Soul: Identity, Imperialism, and Rumors of Cannibalism in Sixteenth-Century Brazil". *Journal of World History* 17, no.1 (March 2006): 51-69.
- Martínez, José Luis. *Documentos cortesianos*. Vols I-IV. Mexico: FCE, 1992.
- . *Hernán Cortés*. Mexico: FCE, 1990.
- Martínez Millán, José, ed. *Carlos V y la quiebra del humanismo político en Europa (1530-1558)*. Vol 1. Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2001.
- . *La Corte de Carlos V*. Vol IV. Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2000.
- Maura, Juan Francisco. *Españolas de Ultramar en la historia y en la literatura*. Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2005.
- . *El gran burlador de América: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*. Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2008.
- . *Naufragios*. Introduction and Ed. Madrid: Cátedra, 1998.
- Mayer, Thomas F. and D.R. Woolf, Eds. and Introduction. *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from Cassandra Fedele to Louis XIV*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.
- McAlister, Lyle N. *Spain and Portugal in the New World: 1492-1700*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

- Menninger, Annerose. "Hans Stadens 'Wahrhaftige Historia': Zur Genese eines Bestsellers der Reiseliteratur." *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 47, no. 9 (1996): 510–2.
- Mexía, Pedro. *Historia imperial y cesárea*. Anvers, en casa de la Biuda de Martin Nucio. 1561.
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Cartas, crónicas y relaciones del descubrimiento y la conquista." *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana*. Vol. I. Ed. Luis Iñigo Madrigal. Madrid: Cátedra, 1992.
- . *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.
- . "El metatexto historiográfico y la historiografía indiana". *MLN* 96 (1981): 358-402.
- Miralles Ostos, Juan. "Estudio Preliminar". *Historia de la Conquista de México*. Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1997: ix-lx.
- Molloy, Sylvia. *At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in Spanish America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Montaigne, Michel de. "Of Cannibals." *The Essays*. Trans. Charles Cotton. London: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952: 91-97.
- . "Of Coaches." *The Essays*. Trans. Charles Cotton. London: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952: 434-442.
- Morel-Fatio, Alfred. *Historiographie de Charles-Quint*. Paris: H. Champion, 1913.
- Myers, Kathleen Ann. *Fernández de Oviedo's chronicle of America: a new history for a New World*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.
- Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Álvar. *Relación de los Naufragios y Comentarios de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*. Ed. Manuel Serrano y Sanz, 2 Vols. (v and vi). Librería general de Victoriano Suárez, Madrid, 1906.
- Núñez Muley, Francisco. *A memorandum for the president of the royal audiencia and chancery court of the city and Kingdom of Granada*. Ed., trans., and introduction by Vincent Barletta. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Oakley, Francis. "Christian Obedience and Authority, 1520-1550." in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*. Eds. James Henderson Burns and Mark Goldie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994: 159-192.

- Olney, James. *Memory and Narrative: the Weave of Life-Writing*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Ong, Walter. *The Presence of the Word*. 2nd Edition. Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, 2000.
- Páez de Castro, Juan. "De las cosas necesarias para escribir Historia" 1555. In Fr. Eustasio Esteban, 1892, *La Ciudad de Dios*, No. 28-29: 601-10, 27-37.
- Pagden, Anthony. Ed. and Trans. *Francisco de Vitoria: Political Writings*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- . "Introduction." in *Letters from Mexico*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001.
- . *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Papell, Antonio. *Reyes y Corsarios: Los Barbarroja*. Bilbao, Impr. de J. Ausin, 1935?
- Pérez de Gúzmán, Fernán. *Generaciones y semblanzas*. Ed. R.B. Tate. London: Tamesis Books Limited, 1965.
- . *Pen Portraits of Illustrious Castillians*. Trans. Marie Gillette and Loretta Zehngut. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
- Pellús Pérez, Elena. *Sobre las hazañas de Hernán Cortés*. Introduction and Translation. Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 2007.
- Plutarch. *Lives of Illustrious Men*. The Spencer Press, 1936.
- Pompa, Cristina. "Profetas e santidades selvagens. Missionários e *caraíbas* no Brasil colonial." *Revista Brasileira de História*. [online]. 2001, vol.21, n.40, pp. 177-193. March 1 2010.
- Pounder, James Whitney. *The Reformation*. New York: Macmillan, 1907.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Prud'homme, Johanne and Lyne Légaré (2006). "The Subject in Process," in Louis Hébert (dir.), *Signo* [online], Rimouski (Quebec), <<http://www.signosemio.com>> April 15 2010.
- Pulgar, Fernando del. *Claros varones de Castilla*. 1486. Ed., and introduction Robert Brian Tate. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971.

- Rabasa, José. "Dialogue as Conquest in the Cortés-Charles V Correspondence." In *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993: 83-124.
- . *Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier: The Historiography of Sixteenth Century New Mexico and Florida and the Legacy of Conquest*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Rabin, Lisa. "Figures of Conversion and Subjectivity in Colonial Narrative." *Hispania*, 82, 1 (March 1999): 40-45.
- Religious Peace of Augsburg, 1555*. in Emil Reich, Ed. *Select Documents*. London 1905: 230-232.
- Rhua, Pedro de. *Cartas de Rhua lector en Soria sobre las obras del Reuerendissimo señor Obispo de Mondoñedo dirigidas al mesmo*. Burgos: Juan de Junta, 1549.
- Rivero Rodríguez, Manuel. *Carlos V y el sueño del Imperio*. Madrid: Silex Ediciones, 2005.
- Roa-de-la Carrera, Cristián Andrés. *Histories of Infamy: Francisco López de Gómara and the Ethics of Spanish Imperialism*. Trans. Scott Sessions. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005.
- Rodríguez-Salgado, M.J. *The Changing Face of Empire: Charles V, Philip II, and Habsburg Authority, 1551-1559*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Rose, Sonia V. "'The Great Moctezuma': A Literary Portrait in Sixteenth-Century Spanish American Historiography." *Modelling the Individual: Biography and Portrait in the Renaissance*. Eds. Karl Enekel and Peter Liebrechts. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi, 1998: 109-132.
- Saen de Casas, Carmen. "El arte del retrato en los *Annales del Emperador Carlos V* de Francisco López de Gómara." *Talla Dixit* 2 (2007): 67-93.
- Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George Schwab. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Schmolz-Haberlein, Michaela and Mark Haberlein. "Hans Staden, Neil L. Whitehead, and the Cultural Politics of Scholarly Publishing." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81, no. 3-4 (2001): 745-751.
- Schwartz, Stuart. "Luso-Spanish Relations in Hapsburg Brazil, 1580-1640". *The Americas*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jul., 1968): 33-48.

- Sharpe, Kevin and Steven N. Zwicker. *Writing Lives: Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2008.
- Sharpling, Gerard Paul. "Towards a Rhetoric of Experience: the Role of *Enargeia* in the Essays of Montaigne." *Rhetorica*. Vol. 20, No. 2 (2002): 173-192.
- Simpson, Lesley Byrd. Introduction and translation. *Cortés, the Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966.
- Slater, John. "History as an Ekphrastic Genre in Early Modern Spain". *MLN* 122 (2007): 217-232.
- Smith, Paul Julian. *Writing in the Margin: Spanish Literature of the Golden Age*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Sola, Emilio. *Argelia, entre el desierto y el mar*. Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1993.
- . "La saga de los Barbarroja." *Historia 16* 14, no. 158-161 (1989): 8-16, 73-81, 82-90, 91-98.
- . *Un Mediterráneo de piratas: Corsarios, renegados y cautivos*. Madrid: Tecnos, 1988.
- Sola, Emilio, and Miguel Ángel de Bunes, eds. *La vida, y historia de Hayradin llamado Barbarroja: Gazavat-I Hayreddin Pasa (La crónica del guerrero de la Fe Hayreddin Barbarroja)*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1997.
- Soucek, Svat. "The Rise of Barbarossa in North Africa," in *Archivum Ottomanicum* (1971): 238-250.
- Soly, Hugo. "Charles V and his Time" in *Charles V 1500-1558 and his Time*. Trans. Alastair Weir. Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1999.
- Sosa, Antonio de. *An Early Modern Dialogue with Islam: Antonio de Sosa's Topography of Algiers (1612)*. María Antonia Garcés, Editor, and Diana de Armas Wilson, Translator. Introduction and notes by María Antonia Garcés. Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming 2011.
- . *Topografía e historia general de Argel*. Ed. Diego de Haedo. Ignacio Bauer y Landuaer, ed. 3 vols. Madrid: Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, 1927-29.
- Spadaccini, Nicholas and Jenaro Taléns, eds. *Autobiography in Early Modern Spain*. Minneapolis: Prisma Institute, 1988.

- Staden, Hans. *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil*. Ed., Intro. and Trans. Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Harbsmeier. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Starobinski, Jean. "The Style of Autobiography." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. 73-83.
- Struever, Nancy. *The Language of History in the Renaissance: Rhetoric and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Tapia, Andrés de. "Relación". in *Colección de documentos para la historia de México*. Vol. 2. Ed. Joaquín García Icazbalceta. México: Portal de Agustinos, 1866.
- TenHuisen, Dwight. "Providence and Passio in Hans Staden's *Warhaftig Historia*." in *Foreign Encounters: Case Studies in German Literature before 1700*. Eds. Mara Wade and Glenn Ehrstine. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005. 213-248.
- Thevet, André. *Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres*. Paris, 1584.
- . *The wonders of Antarctic France: otherwise called America, and many lands and islands discovered in our time*. Trans. L.E. Chittenden. New York: [s.n.], 1869.
- Thompson, I.A.A. "Castile, Spain and the Monarchy: the political community from *patria natural* to *patria nacional*" in *Spain, Europe and the Atlantic: Essays in Honour of John H. Elliott*. Eds. Richard Kagan and Geoffrey Parker. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Torre Revello, José. "Esclavas blancas en las Indias occidentales". *Boletín del Instituto de investigaciones Históricas* 6 (1927-1928): 263-271.
- Tracy, James D. *Europe's Reformations, 1450-1650: Doctrine, Politics, and Community*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.
- Villas Boas, Luciana. "The Anatomy of Cannibalism: Religious Vocabulary and Ethnography". *Studies in Travel Writing* 121 (March 2008): 7-27.
- . *Travel Writing and Religious Dissent. Hans Staden's Warhaftig Historia in Print*. Diss. Columbia University, 2006. Ann Arbor, UMI, 2006. 3203743.
- . "Wild Stories of a Pious Travel Writer. The Unruly Example of Hans Staden's *Warhaftig Historia* (Marburg, 1557)" in *Foreign Encounters: Case Studies in German Literature before 1700*. Eds. Mara Wade and Glenn Ehrstine. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005: 187-209.

Voigt, Lisa. *Writing Captivity in the Early Modern Atlantic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Von Friedeburg, Robert. "Why did seventeenth century estates address the jurisdictions of their princes as fatherlands? War, territorial absolutism and duties to the fatherland in seventeenth century German political discourse." in *Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies in Early Modern German Culture. Order and Creativity: 1550-1750*. Eds. Randolph C. Head and Daniel Christensen. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2007: 169-196.

Wagner, Henry R. "The Lost First Letter of Cortés." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Nov., 1941): 669-672.

—. "Francisco López de Gómara and His Works." *American Antiquarian Society*. Oct. 1948: 263-282.

Wardropper, Bruce W. "Don Quixote": Story or History?" *Modern Philology* 63 (1965): 1-11.

White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Whitehead, Neil. "The Haberleins and the Political Culture of Scholarship." *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 81, no. 3-4 (2001): 753-756.

—. "Hans Staden and the Cultural Politics of Cannibalism," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (2000): 721-151.

—. Introduction. *Hans Staden's True History*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.

Wolf, Eric. *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Wulff Alonso, Fernando. *Las esencias patrias: historiografía e historia antigua en la construcción de la identidad española (siglos XVI-XX)*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2003.

Zimmerman, T.C. Price. "Paolo Giovio and the Rhetoric of Individuality" in *The Rhetorics of Life Writing in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Thomas F. Mayer and D.R. Woolf. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995a. 39-62.

—. *Paolo Giovio: the historian and the crisis of sixteenth-century Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995b.